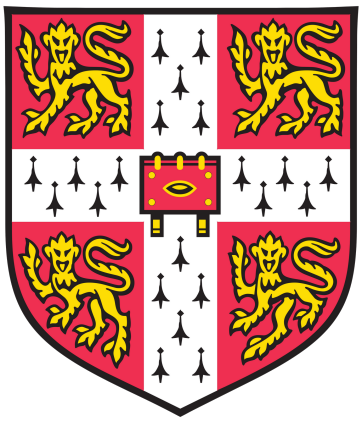
Cross-Cultural Leadership Development in China



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DECLARATION

- This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.
- It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text
- The dissertation does not exceed 80,000 words, which is the word limit prescribed by the Education Degree Committee.

Signed: 

Date: 29 March 2019

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"In China, everything is complicated, but anything is possible. In the West, everything is easy, but nothing is possible"

Dr Mandy Qin.

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I dedicate this work to Emilie and Luva in gratitude for your tremendous love and support!

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Western cross-cultural leadership development initiatives in China. The aim of the study is to understand and improve the practice of Western enterprises conducting business in the Chinese market. The research approach adopted included a qualitative exploratory interview investigation with 5 companies in the following industries: oil and gas; shipping and logistics; retail; fast-moving consumer goods; and banking. In total, 24 Chinese high-potential employees and 7 representatives for the companies' global leadership development strategy were interviewed. The dissertation sets the stage with a historical overview of 6 prevailing leadership paradigms in modern management. This is followed by the central philosophies of Chinese leadership. Finally, relevant literature on leadership development in China and the West is reviewed. Throughout the literature review, gaps in the research are identified and discussed which inform the methodological framework of the study. Through a phenomenographic analysis, the data of this study are grouped into categories of descriptions containing different views on effective leadership and leadership development. The findings from this research provide evidence that the conceptualisations of leadership and leadership development amongst the interviewees are multifaceted and the interviewees occasionally step in and out of different views, and thus they adhere to multiple conceptions.

The main conclusions related to leadership conceptions drawn by this study are as follows: (i) Chinese managers in Western companies conceptualise leadership with reference to 'Western' and 'Chinese' leadership styles; (ii) Chinese managers tending to agree with all 6 paradigms connect to the principles of Daoism; (iii) Chinese managers' holistic manner of conceptualising leadership is considered unfocused and vague by Western headquarters; (iv) the lack of alignment in conceptualisations of leadership causes Western headquarters to hesitate in promoting Chinese managers to senior management positions; and (v) Chinese managers report the importance of 'care' and 'guanxi' in Chinese companies. The Chinese managers described Chinese leaders as caring, warm, and paternal; by contrast, care in Western companies was associated purely with professional support.

The main conclusions related to leadership development drawn by this study are as follows: (i) Chinese managers and headquarters perceive leadership development as both formal classroom teaching as well as social interaction in daily work; (ii) whilst some companies practice a globally centralised approach to leadership development, others modify their programmes to a Chinese context; (iii) Chinese managers perceive pedagogical approaches to leadership development tailored to a Chinese culture as successful; in particular, initiatives such as rotation schemes, exposure to senior management, rigorous individual development plans, mentoring, and group work structures outbalancing power differences are perceived positively; and (iv) among the unsuccessful approaches mentioned is a lack of investment in tailoring pedagogical initiatives to a Chinese context. Such approaches created a lack of purpose and unclear criteria. This study concludes that enhancing alignment is particularly crucial, as is the mutual understanding of leadership and leadership development conceptions when developing leaders cross-culturally in China.

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1 – Research Context

1.1 Introduction

No country in world history resembles China's rapid economic and technological development of the past four decades. These advances have allowed Chinese companies to compete in sophisticated product markets, previously dominated by Western monopolies (Brandt & Thun, 2015). The historically embedded perception of China as the world's production hall, offering extremely cheap low-quality production, no longer holds much truth (Zeng & Williamson, 2007).

Today, Chinese firms are targeting high-end products and industries advancing into value-added activities with market conditions offering significant growth opportunities domestically and globally. Because of these market conditions, particularly the size of their home market, Chinese firms hold the potential to blow many of today's Western businesses apart (Brandt & Thun, 2015). China's entry onto the global scene and its hasty technological developments caused Tse (2010) to conclude that: "No major enterprise or financial institution can avoid doing business with China – if not directly, then through myriad hidden connections" (Tse, 2010, p. 1). Additionally, Wang and Chee (2011) indicated that with China's integration into the world economy, China now affects the competitiveness of many Western companies whether they are operating in China or not.

As China continues to 'open up' to the rest of the world, succeeding in the Chinese market has never been more important for global companies. Consequently, a growing number of Western enterprises have engaged in co-operations, joint ventures, or direct investments in China, and have faced cultural differences and challenges from different leadership styles (Li, 2014). However, although these companies have extensively adopted Western, cutting-edge management techniques, which are highly effective in the West, these styles of enacting leadership have consistently failed in a Chinese context because of cultural differences (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009; Zhu, 2017). In light of this, Kedl, Tsai, Balis, Basmajian, and Bian (2012) reported educational issues, such as

finding top talents, leadership training, and retaining leaders, to rank as one of the most difficult challenges for Western companies operating in China.

Attempting to explain these challenges, Casimir and Waldman (2007) suggested that a central reason for the difficulties in developing Chinese leaders were the differences in conceptualisations of leadership between the East and West. They proposed that certain characteristics of a culture render specific leadership characteristics and styles more acceptable and effective in 'high power-distance cultures' (e.g., China) than in 'low power-distance cultures' (e.g., Australia). Casimir and Waldman (2007) further suggested that employees should be aware of cultural differences and similarities in leadership prototypes when they wish to effectively develop leaders cross-culturally.

Thus, I propose that gaining insights into how mental models in China and the West affect cross-cultural leadership and leadership development is vital for the academic fields of psychology and education. This study aims to elucidate this topic by examining in-depth how various conceptualisations of leadership and leadership development affect cross-cultural leadership development in China. Ultimately, this study aims to gain an understanding of why it has consistently proven difficult for Western companies to develop leaders in China.

1.2 Why China?

In many respects, the rise of China has been one of the most remarkable developments of the modern era. From 1980 to 2017, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew from approximately $300 to $13,500 billion (*International Monetary Fund* [IMF], 2018). The Chinese GDP has, in other words, grown by approximately 45-fold since Deng Xiaoping[1] introduced the economic reform of 1978, including 'special economic zones' that enabled trade between China and the rest of the world (Tse, 2010). During these years, Chinese growth was more than three times as high as that of the United States, leaving China accountable for one-fifth of the global economy (IMF, 2018). *The World Bank* reported that during this period, China had managed to lift more than 800

[1] Deng Xiaoping was paramount leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1989 (Tse, 2010).

million people out of poverty (*The World Bank*, 2018). In addition, companies in various industries had increasingly been shipping their products and services outside the country (ibid.).

With a population of over 1.3 billion, China is playing an increasingly influential role in the development of the global economy as the largest single contributor to world growth since the global financial crisis of 2008 (ibid.). The Communist Party remained firmly in control when Deng Xiaoping began 'opening up the country' in 1979; nevertheless, Tanner (1999) observed in The Politics of Lawmaking in Post-Mao China that by the late 1990s, Chinese politics had already undertaken a great change towards more of a multi-stage, multi-arena system than a unitary, hierarchical, top-down system. Tanner further described that processes and power relationships between these arenas increasingly lost their hierarchical definition, both formally and informally, and power resources were fragmented amongst a proliferating number of leaders and organisations. These changes in the lawmaking system were linked with changes to the broader aim of making this segment of the political system more permeable to a variety of social interests. With this development, China adopted many practices often associated with capitalism in the West, such as membership of the *World Trade Organization* (WTO).

As an example of Chinese companies entering more sophisticated product markets that formerly belonged to the West, Useem et al. (2017) highlighted the story of the *Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China* (COMAC). In 2015, COMAC introduced their C919, a single-aisle airliner and direct competitor to Boeing's 737 and Airbus' 320; COMAC instantly received 500 orders from 21 airlines. Useem et al. further noted that on the global real estate market in 2015, Chinese property companies such as *Greenland Holdings Group* and *Dalian Wanda Group* owned more than $8.6 billion worth of property in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Overall, foreign direct investments and acquisitions of Chinese companies abroad accelerated in the mid-2010s, rising from virtually zero during the 2000s to more than $13 billion by 2015 (Blomberg, 2017). During 2016, China overtook the United States as the number one acquirer of foreign companies in Europe as well as worldwide (ibid.). *Haier Group*, for instance, acquired *General Electric's* (GE's) appliance division in 2016 for $4.5 billion, including 12,000 employees and the right to use the 'GE brand' for 40 years (Chen, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Whilst large American companies have had a century-long head start, many

Chinese commercial upstarts have entered the global *Fortune 500s* at remarkable speed (Fortune 500, 2018). Consequently, various scholars have suggested that for Western companies to remain competitive, they should start learning from how Chinese companies manage and run their operations (Davis, 2004).

Along with China's economic growth arose a large group of entrepreneurs and executives running private companies who were born and raised in the context of a rigidly anticapitalist system (Useem et al., 2017). For example, Zhang Ruimin, now one of China's most influential business leaders and the CEO of *Haier Group*, the world's largest appliance group, is also an official of the Communist Party (Chen, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Zhang is the son of factory workers, and ironically previously worked with the Red Guards, Mao's shock troops charged with toppling down all elements associated with capitalism (Geoff, 2011). Useem et al. (2017) described how initially the conditions for private companies in China were decidedly hostile. China did not promulgate its first law governing private companies until 1994, nor did it offer constitutional protection of private property until 2007. Rights that Western companies would take for granted, such as setting prices, entering new markets, and fixing wages were aspects of business that Chinese entrepreneurs arising in the 1980s had hardly any experience with when running their businesses. Consequently, Chinese leaders had to develop their own management models and systems. Useem et al. (2017) stated that among Chinese business leaders, this development:

> '… evolved a cluster of ideas and methods for taking action that constitute a distinctive mindset: a combination of both cognitive and emotional factors that shape how executives see their market, their firm's place in it, and their leadership of it' (Useem et al., 2017, p. 4).

Furthermore, Warner and Goodall (2010) stressed that because of a lack of trained Chinese managers, the focus on leadership development and management training has been highly prioritised in China since the economic reform introduced in 1979. However, as Chinese technological and economic growth continues, understanding how Chinese managers have responded to the challenge of leadership development is necessary (Warner & Goodall, 2010).

Various scholars (e.g., Tse, 2010; Zeng & Williamson, 2007) have emphasised the urgent need for understanding Chinese leaders' distinct manner of doing business to

compete against—or successfully partner with—the companies that already dominate the Chinese market, which are increasingly coming to the fore on the world stage. Chen and Lee (2008b) argued that twenty-first-century leadership in China is not well understood by the outside world, causing tensions between managers and leaders when collaborating cross-culturally inside and outside of China.

In sum, in the prospect of China's economic and technological growth as well as its increasing global position, not succeeding on the Chinese market as a multinational company can have fatal consequences in terms of global success. Because of failed attempts to apply Western management models in China as well as the increasing number of successful Chinese business leaders, the present author considered researching the field of cross-cultural leadership development in China to be of paramount importance. Such knowledge is vital to gain a deeper understanding of how Western companies can strengthen their China operations, and ultimately, their global competitiveness.

1.3 Thesis Structure and Main Arguments

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant studies related to cross-cultural leadership development in China; Chapter 3 describes the methodology utilised in this study as well as presents the analytical tools it developed and applied; Chapters 4 to 6 report the empirical findings; and Chapter 7 encompasses the discussion and conclusions as well as the contributions and limitations of the study.

Through the review of relevant empirical research, **Chapter 2** presents the literature on leadership and leadership development in the West and in China, which is considered to have an impact on the way modern scholars and practitioners think about these concepts. In light of relevant literature, the chapter articulates the study's specific research questions aimed at exploring and contributing to the academic field.

Chapter 3 outlines a suitable methodology and analysis strategy for conducting such a study. It proposes that because of the premature state of the academic topic at hand, an explorative qualitative investigation is suitable. Additionally, because conceptualisations

are explored, a phenomenographic analysis approach is adopted. Subsequently, an overview and design of the interview schedule is outlined. This includes the analytical tools and procedures developed and adopted to conduct the study. Finally, the ethical considerations associated with a study of this type are presented.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study concerning Chinese managers' conceptualisations of effective leadership and leadership development. The results show that these conceptions are multifaceted and produced with reference to what are conceived of as 'Western' and 'Chinese' styles, which have consequences as to how effective leadership and leadership development are perceived.

Chapter 5 presents results relating to five foreign companies' views on leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development when training leaders in China. A crucial distinction is that whilst some views strongly emphasise contextual aspects, others adopt a globally centralised approach to leadership and leadership development.

Chapter 6 presents results regarding the extent to which the various approaches to leadership and leadership development are perceived as successful by this study's participants. Chinese managers' respective perceptions of successful and unsuccessful initiatives for leadership development are divided into five categories that are discussed in relation to the previous chapter. To conclude, recommendations for future leadership development practices are outlined.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the findings of the study, which are held up against the literature review in Chapter 2. It is argued that the Chinese managers' conceptualisations can be assigned to multiple Western leadership paradigms and understood in the light of three Chinese philosophical points of view: Confucianism, Daoism, and legalism. This holistic manner of reasoning is perceived by the Western companies as vague and being afraid of conflict. The chapter concludes that it is of paramount importance to enhance alignment and the mutual understanding of leadership and leadership development when developing leaders cross-culturally in China. The chapter closes by addressing the limitations of the study as well as suggesting a list of recommendations for researchers and practitioners in future leadership and leadership development practices in China.

CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a review of the literature that has suggested the need for exploring cross-cultural leadership development in China. It is divided into the following three main sections:

1. A historical overview of leadership conceptions.
2. Chinese leadership philosophies and practices.
3. Leadership development in China and the West.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the reviewed literature, identifying the gaps that guide this study's research questions.

2.2 Historical Overview of Leadership Conceptions

When reading through the literature on leadership, I encountered an overwhelming quantity of studies. The supply of literature suggesting methods of enacting leadership as well as the traits to develop and habits to adopt was enormous. However, examining the methodological rigour of these studies deeply, it seemed that the vast majority were based on vaguely researched claims and almost religiously held beliefs. Even in many cases of what from a swift glance appeared to be well-referenced papers, following the paths of these references often led to dead ends in non-scientific articles, which failed to provide academic requirements such as sample size, method, context, validity, and reliability. A similar conclusion was reached by Dubrin (2000), who asserted that more than 35,000 definitions of leadership existed in the literature. Additionally, Stogdill agreed with this observation, and famously stated in 1974 that: 'There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept' (Stogdill, 1974, p. 7).

In light of the jumble that prevails in the academic field of leadership, Casimir and Waldman (2007) suggested that aligning conceptions of leadership is vital when developing leaders cross-culturally. However, to reduce complexity and fully capture the origin from which different conceptions of leadership arise, a rigorous empirical framework was required. Consequently, I decided to conduct a historical overview of the major empirical leadership paradigms in modern management. Such a framework could be used to untangle from which empirical paradigms different views on leadership arise. Moreover, it could help to uncover what parts of Western leadership have influenced Chinese managers when working in Western companies. Finally, such an approach would help to systematically inform the methodology section regarding the gaps in the academic field of leadership research.

First, the present chapter distinguishes between leadership and management, because the lack of this differentiation has often been subject to confusion. Second, it presents six empirical leadership paradigms in modern Western management.

2.2.1 Leadership Versus Management

The terms *leadership* and *management* are often used interchangeably and each evokes multiple meanings (Kotterman, 2006). Managers demonstrate leadership, and likewise, leaders usually possess managerial skills (Bass, 1990; Mintzberg, 2013). Traditionally, leadership was a concept largely used in social and political settings. In many organisations, leadership has been prominent in the workplace, receiving an elevated status above management (e.g., Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1977). Bennis and Nanus (1985) famously argued that '*managers do things right*' whilst '*leaders do the right thing*'. Managers seek to maintain order and stability—they are technicians, administrators, and problem-solvers, whereas a leader is a prophet, catalyst, and strategist (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Similarly, Kotter (1990) emphasised the importance of leadership and consigned management to a lesser role. From this perspective, managers are more rational and controlling and relate to structure, stability, and bureaucracy, whereas leadership concerns passion, vision, inspiration, creativity, and cooperation rather than control.

By contrast, scholars (e.g., Ezzamel & Willmott, 2016; Parker & Parker, 2017) have recently described management from a critical perspective. Although this body of

literature is diverse, theoretically fragmented, and widely varied in terms of methodologies and ontological assumptions, a sense of antagonism holds these studies together (Parker & Parker, 2017). Fournier and Grey (2000) stated that the core of these critical perspectives is their focus on 'non-performative intent'. With reference to Lyotard (1984), the authors described performative intent as the 'intent to develop and celebrate knowledge that contributes to the production of maximum output for minimum input' (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 17). Opposed to Kotter (1990) and Zaleznik (1977), critical management studies have generally aimed to challenge—and ultimately neutralise—the assumption of performative managerialism and instead have focused on ethics-, power structure-, and sustainability-related areas (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

In light of this, Zald (1996) described management education as in crisis, and consequently called for more humanities- and social science-based curricula, or a return to the liberal arts tradition. Furthermore, Beyes, Parker, and Steyaert (2016) sought to stage an intervention into what is taught at business schools to squarely position humanities and social sciences within this discourse, coupling academic rigour with external relevance. Arguing that the global market regulations for modern business are insufficient, these authors advocated a type of management education that emphasises a stronger focus on ethical, political, and sustainable business responsibilities, with less emphasis on efficiency and profit optimisation.

For example, critical authors such as Ezzamel and Willmott (2016) argued that strategic management depends: '1) upon the (theorising) power that (re)presents it in a particular way; and 2) upon the power to persuade others of the merits of its claims, which depends not upon intrinsic value but, rather, upon its resonance with what they/you conceive to be credible and relevant' (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2016, p. 311). With reference to Foucault (1972, 1977), these authors noted that 'the key point to be grasped is how, as a discourse, strategy and its enactment as 'strategic management' contribute to the construction of the social reality that it is understood to describe or justify' (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2016, p. 315).

In addition, Venkitachalam and Willmott (2015) stated, citing empirical evidence from four in-depth case studies, that the primary concern of business management must be whether strategy and key performance indicators are congruent with potential changes in the dynamic interaction of internal and external environmental factors. They identified these factors to be organisational politics and leadership, culture, external competition,

and technology. Recognition of the dynamic interactions between these factors is crucial for enabling the flexible development of management strategies so they are more congruent with their changing contexts as well as with overall business strategies, as opposed to being myopically governed by a static and inflexible formula (Venkitachalam & Willmott, 2015).

Consequently, the discourse of critical management has assigned environmental, political, and strategic elements to the role and responsibilities of the manager, which earlier were associated with leadership and not management. Raynard, Johnson, and Greenwood (2016) indicated that institutional leadership and management analyses often concern what is taken for granted within an organisation, whereas little light has been shed upon how particular forms of 'taken-for-grantedness' become privileged and institutionalised. It is therefore a central point of Venkitachalam and Willmott (2015) that such research should be aimed at paying closer attention to the multiple environmental and institutional realities that managers and leaders face.

In sum, during the past four decades, the changing requirements of management have challenged the definitions of—and expectations on—good leadership. In general, modern companies have faced the challenge of responding to the increasing external societal complexity and level of uncertainty with more complex structures inside their organisations (Bass, 1990; Trist, 1983). Already in 1981, Trist emphasised that the authoritarian control structure and its tendency to debase human resources (HR) are an organisational form that cannot absorb increasing global complexity and environmental turbulence. This debate has resulted in a myriad of definitions and conceptualisations of leadership and management, which have often overlapped (Kotterman, 2006; Mintzberg, 2013).

Dubrin (2000) argued that despite the numerous definitions of leadership in the literature, what is meant by the term has rarely been unfolded. Instead, leadership selection remains ad hoc and leadership development becomes subject to arbitrary methods, the impact of which on organisational performance has little evidence (Bolden, Gosling, Hawkins, & Taylor, 2011).

In the following subsection, to develop a conceptual framework for the purpose of this study, the research on leadership will be condensed into six major empirical paradigms:

1) Individual leadership
2) Contextual leadership
3) New Leadership
4) Collective leadership
5) Followers
6) Post-modern leadership

2.2.2 Individual Leadership

The main body of literature on leadership focuses on leadership described through individual characteristics. This stream takes on a positivist theoretical framework and presents a long search that attempts to define what aspects of personality (i.e., traits) make a good leader (e.g., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Zaleznik, 1989). For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985) conducted individual 1-hour interviews with 90 leaders; 60 of the interviews were conducted with successful CEOs in the private sector and 30 with outstanding leaders from the public sector, such as university presidents, politicians, government administrators, and even a symphony orchestra conductor. The participants, mostly men, were analysed by comparing differences and similarities in personality traits. By re-examining the data repeatedly, the authors identified and quantified patterns in the data's underlying themes. Gradually, four areas of competencies emerged: (1) intensity of vision; (2) meaningful and clear communication; (3) establishing and maintaining trust; and (4) positive management of self (i.e., fitting strengths and weaknesses to the organisation's needs).

Another approach, derived from cognitive behavioural psychology, has attempted to identify what leaders do rather than what their personalities consist of (e.g., Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Harris, 1962). This functionalist approach has aimed to develop and modify a potential leader's behaviour to improve their leadership (Stogdill, 1948). For instance, as part of what has been referred to as the 'Ohio Studies', Stogdill and Coons (1957) described the development of the *Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire*, its revisions and adaptations, and a summary of results of its use in a variety of organisational settings. Through this quantitative questionnaire, respondents were not only asked to describe the behaviour of their leaders but also to rate the quality of their

leadership on a scale of seven steps ranging from 'perfect' to 'poor'. After correlations between certain traits and good leaders were defined, individuals were trained and tested against these lists of traits to improve behaviours (e.g., Fleishman, 1953; Stogdill, 1948). Although it is not within the scope of this dissertation to review the findings of all these studies, it can be mentioned that the *Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire* was applied in various settings, such as with Air Force personnel and in schools, to develop and modify leadership behaviour (Stogdill & Coons, 1957). In this case, the 130-item questionnaire was administered to crewmembers who were called upon to describe their commanders. A factor analysis of the intercorrelations among eight hypothesized dimensions of leader behaviour resulted in the emergence of the following four factors: Consideration, Initiating Structure, Production Emphasis, and Social Awareness. The two factors Consideration and Initiating Structure accounted for 83% of the total factor variance. The study exhibited high and useful reliabilities through these short keys of .93 and .86, respectively, using the Spearman-Brown formula to correct for attenuation. Even though the two scales were correlated to a moderate degree (approximately .45), Halpin and Winer (1957) described how they were considered sufficiently independent to permit their use for measuring different types of behaviour. Although Consideration and Initiating Structure were found to be orthogonal factors, uncorrelated factor scores could not be obtained (Halpin & Winer, 1957).

Among more recent studies on individual leadership, Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014) investigated personal traits for effective leadership among police officers through a systematic review of studies on police leadership. Based on summaries and a synthesis of 57 peer reviewed relevant journal articles, the authors suggested the following seven key characteristics as being crucial for police leadership: ethical behaviour, communication, being a role model, trustworthiness, legitimacy, decision-making, and critical, creative, and strategic thinking ability.

Nichols and Cottrell (2014) researched individuals' desire for different traits in leaders dependent on the leader's position in an organisation. First, the participants of the study ($N = 116$) rated the traits they perceived their current supervisor to possess, traits they desired in their supervisors, and traits they associated with a leader in that role in general. Second, the participants rated the desirability of these same traits for six high-level and six low-level leaders. Third, to force them to prioritise traits, participants

designed ideal high- or low-level leaders. The study concluded that participants consistently desired trustworthiness and intelligence in leaders, yet they differentially desired other traits depending on leaders' seniority.

Casimir and Waldman (2007) conducted a similar study in a Chinese context, comparing perceptions of the importance of 18 traits for effective low- and high-level leaders. Their study included 84 full-time white-collar participants from Australia and 244 full-time white-collar employees from China. Through a multivariate analysis, cultural differences were found in terms of which traits were regarded as valuable for effective leadership. For example, the Australians rated traits that attenuated leader–follower power differences more highly than did the Chinese. People from both cultures, however, regarded charismatic/visionary leadership as more important for high-level leaders. Consequently, the study concluded that the perceived importance of specific leadership traits is determined partly by culturally endorsed interpersonal norms and partly by the requirements of the leadership role.

Studying the organisational literature on leadership, Kets de Vries (1994) identified the following common traits of a good leader: conscientiousness, extraversion, dominance, self-confidence, energy, agreeableness, intelligence, openness to experience, and emotional stability. Kets de Vries considered these traits confusing, highly open-ended, and, when discussed, they opened up a heated polemic as to their real meaning. A common criticism of the trait/competency approach is that it is over simplistic, reductionist, and offers unrealistic solutions to complex problems (e.g., Barley & Kunda, 1992; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002).

Therefore, it is interesting to further explore whether Chinese leaders conceptualise effective leadership and the training thereof with more or less emphasis on trait-spotting and individual competencies than what is conceptualised in foreign organisations.

2.2.3 Contextual Leadership

Until the early 1980s, contingency theories dominated leadership thinking within the field of organisational psychology. Whereas individual leadership perspectives offer 'one best way' to handle followers, contingency scholars (e.g., Fiedler & Chemers,

1984; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958) have emphasised that leadership style depends on context, and therefore may not be effective in all organisational and cultural settings.

Building on research observations of group development in carefully designed training laboratories, Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) found that whether a manager should be democratic or autocratic, or something in between, depended on three sets of situational forces:

- **Forces in the manager**: Personality, values, preferences, beliefs about employee participation, and confidence in subordinates.
- **Forces in the subordinates**: The need for independence, tolerance of ambiguity, knowledge of the problem, and expectations of involvement.
- **Forces in the situation**: Organisational norms, size and location of work groups, effectiveness of teamwork, and the nature of the problem.

(Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958)

Studying the relationship between leadership and organisational performance, Fiedler (1967) developed *The Contingency Model*. Fiedler distinguished between leaders providing subordinates with *structured* and *unstructured tasks*[2]. The model was quantitatively evaluated in a variety of group situations (e.g., Fiedler & Chemers, 1974, 1984; Fiedler, 1967), including both ongoing teams from the work level to the board of directors and laboratory groups created for research purposes. Overall, the findings supported the argument that leaders must change their context to determine the conditions under which their preferred style is most likely to succeed.

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) supported the notion that an effective leader must be a strong diagnostician. However, unlike Fiedler (1967), they proposed that leaders must adapt their style to meet the demands of the situation in which they operate. The authors named this approach *Situational Leadership*, which describes leadership behaviour in two dimensions: *task behaviour* and *supportive behaviour*[3]. To validate this theory, the

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[2] A *structured task* contains clear goals, few correct or satisfactory solutions and outcomes, few ways of performing it, and clear criteria of success. An *unstructured task* contains ambiguous goals, many good solutions, many ways of achieving acceptable outcomes, and vague criteria of success (Fiedler, 1967).

[3] *Task behaviour* relates to the amount of direction a leader gives to subordinates, where leaders either facilitate subordinates' decisions, or take care to explain their own. *Supportive behaviour* relates to the social backup a leader gives to subordinates. This can vary from limited communication to considerable listening, facilitating, and supporting.

behaviour of 65 managers in sales, service, administration, and staff functions at *Xerox Information Systems Group* was explored. The managers were asked to complete: (1) a questionnaire collecting demographic data and perceptions about the managers' job performance; (2) a professional maturity scale determining 1–4 subordinates' level of maturity for a set of major objectives; and (3) a manager rating form with five categories ranging from 'unsatisfactory' to 'exceptional', allowing managers to assess their own leadership styles and their subordinates' job performance for each major job objective. The study found that highly effective managers make use of situational leadership by adjusting to be either *telling, selling, participating,* or *delegating* to be effective in a particular context.

Although a central point of contingency theory is that no style of leadership is universally superior, research within the field has suggested that a considerate, participative, or democratic style of leadership is generally more effective than a directive, autocratic style (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). According to Huczynski and Buchanan (2013), this is associated with a long-term social and political trend in Western economies, which has raised expectations about personal freedom and quality of working life. These social and political values encourage resistance to manipulation by impersonal bureaucracies, and challenge the legitimacy of management decisions. However, to what extent this assumption applies in Chinese business contexts, where the surrounding societal structure is nondemocratic, remains to be investigated.

Among more recent contingency studies, Hempel and Martinsons (2009) analysed eight case studies on organisational change in global companies and found that Chinese organisations in particular diverged consistently from initially planned changes. Context was found not only to influence the process of change but also the content and objectives. The authors consequently argued that multinational organisations must recognise that a specific type of policy or leadership practice can represent different changes in different contexts, particularly in China. Furthermore, a central point of the study was that when 'the change to be implemented contains implicit values that differ significantly from existing organisational values, then the change initiative will experience considerable resistance and difficulty due to these value incongruities'

(Hempel & Martinsons, 2009, p. 494). The ‘implemented changes’ discussed in this dissertation concern leadership and leadership development initiatives.

In addition, Reiche, Bird, Mendenhall, and Osland (2017) argued that an ill-defined and underconceptualisation of contextualisation risked equating global leadership roles that are qualitatively highly different. To foster more cohesive theoretical and empirical clarity, the authors developed a typology of global leadership roles that considered context a critical contingency factor. Drawing on role and complexity leadership theories, they proposed four ideal-typical global leadership roles: (1) incremental; (2) operational; (3) connective; and (4) integrative global leadership. These roles were indicated to differ in two central areas: (1) in their task complexity, which included characterising the variety and flux within the task context, and (2) in their relationship complexity, which reflected the boundaries and interdependencies within the relationship context.

Huczynski and Buchanan (2013) criticised contextual leadership theories on several grounds. First, they have overlooked key dimensions of context, such as organisation culture, degree of change, levels of stress, working conditions, external economic factors, organisational design, and technology. Second, given the vague nature of the situational variables presented in the theories, adequately diagnosing the context in which leaders operate is difficult. Third, some personality features may inhibit managers from being participative in some circumstances and directive in others. Finally, the expectations of other managers can influence what is ‘acceptable’, and changing style from one situation to another may not inspire confidence and trust. In relation to this dissertation, it is essential to explore to what extent Chinese leaders conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development with reference to contextual leadership compared with the Western headquarters. Such an exploration would contribute to identifying potential incongruities, which according to Hempel & Martinsons (2009) can be a vital reason for failed cross-cultural collaboration.

2.2.4 New Leadership

In the early 1980s, a movement referred to as ‘new leadership’ emerged. This leadership discourse recognised the role of heroic, powerful, visionary, and charismatic leaders

(Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). The term *new leader* refers to an inspirational figure who motivates followers to higher levels of achievement, and the term *super leader* refers to one who is able to 'lead others to lead themselves' (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992, p. 295). For this reason, the terms *new leader* and *super leader* have, according to Sims and Lorenzi (1992), often been associated with the concept of '*transformational leadership'*.

From a review of research on political leaders, Burns (1978) theorised a distinction between a *transactional leader* and a *transformational leader*. Whereas *transactional leaders* see their relationships with followers in terms of trade, swaps, or bargains, *transformational leaders* are charismatic individuals who inspire and motivate others to perform 'beyond contract'.

To understand how leaders may influence followers to transcend self-interest in optimising their levels of performance, Bass (1985) developed four transformational and two transactional leadership factors. Later, Bass and Avolio (1990) expanded the results to nine single-order factors, which are described in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Nine-Factor Leadership Model according to Bass and Avolio (1990)

Transformational leadership	1. *Intellectual stimulation*: encourage others to see what they are doing from new perspectives. 2. *Idealised influence* (articulated): articulate the organisation's vision. 3. *Idealised influence* (behaviour): charismatic actions centred on values. 4. *Individualised consideration*: develop others to higher levels of ability. 5. *Inspirational motivation*: motivate others to put organisational interests before self-interest.
Transactional leadership	1. *Contingent reward leadership*: clarifying roles, tasks, and rewards. 2. *Management-by-exception active*: ensure standards are met. 3. *Management-by-exception passive*: when intervention after noncompliance has occurred or mistakes have already happened.
Nontransactional laissez-faire leadership	1. *Laissez-faire leadership*: the absence of a transaction in which the leader actively chooses to avoid making decisions.

Scholars researching transformational and transactional leadership have commonly used the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ-5X). This questionnaire was developed with reference to Bass' (1985) factor analysis and measures the components of full-range leadership. The current version of the MLQ-5X features 36 items broken down into nine scales with four items measuring each.

Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003) found support for the abovementioned nine-factor leadership model using largely homogeneous business samples, which consisted of 2,279 pooled male and 1,089 pooled female respondents evaluating leaders of the same sex. The results from the first part of the study led to the conclusion that all the leadership factors were partially metrically invariant across sexes, producing factor loadings that were essentially identical across the two groups. Overall, the results indicated that the MLQ survey should be expected to function similarly for both men and women within U.S.-based organisations. In the second part of the study, Antonakis et al. (2003) utilised factor-level data of 18 independently gathered samples ($N = 6,525$) clustered into prototypically homogeneous contexts. The authors tested the nine-factor model and concluded that it was stable (i.e., fully invariant) within homogeneous contexts.

Among more recent studies, LePine, Zhang, Crawford, and Rich (2016) utilised the MLQ-5X (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to measure the effect of charismatic leadership among 344 U.S. Marines. The study concluded that Marines with leaders who enacted more charismatic behaviours appraised challenge stressors as more challenging and responded to that appraisal with higher performance. Although Marines with a more charismatic leader did not appraise hindrance stressors as less challenging, they responded to the appraisal with higher performance. In essence, the authors found that charismatic leaders transformed their followers' stressor pain into performance gain.

Critically, Hollenbeck, McCall, and Silzer (2006) indicated that identifying the characteristics or competencies of transformational leaders takes research back to the trait-spotting view of leadership, overlooking what is known about the influence of context on leadership effectiveness. Moreover, it must be emphasised that these new leadership theories arose in a Western context, and how such ideas of leadership and leadership development apply in a Chinese context is unknown.

2.2.5 Collective Leadership

Collective leadership occurs in senior teams, project teams, and boards of directors that work together (Western, 2013). According to Western (2013), it provides a different level of containment and confidence than an individual leader, who is more likely to stimulate dependency responses from followers. Western (2013) went on to argue that team leadership may provide more balance and optimisation of diverse capabilities of a group.

To conceptualise a type of leadership that aims to optimise the diverse capabilities of a group, the concept of *distributed leadership* emerged (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Gronn, 2000). This leadership style relates to the changing post-industrial work conditions that cannot be managed in a top-down, expert, command-and-control structure (Bolden, 2011). Raelin (2005, 2003) argued that leaders should create environments that develop 'leaderful' practices in organisations, where all employees are expected to be leaders in a collective endeavour. Goleman (2002) described this distributive leadership as every person at entry level who, in one way or another, acts as a leader. Elmore (2000) agreed with this point of view and stated that in knowledge intensive enterprises, no method of performing complex tasks exists without management activities widely distributing the responsibility for leadership among roles in the organisation.

Gronn (2000) and Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) linked the theoretical framework of distributed leadership to the concept of 'distributed cognition' (Hutchins, 1995) as well as 'activity theory' (Engeström, 1999). Both of these concepts built on the foundational work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1981). The distributed cognition perspective suggests that cognitive capacities are located not simply in individual brains but also in interactions among people, routines, and artefacts (Hutchins, 1995).

Research on distributed leadership (e.g., Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie, & Baeza, 2007; Chreim, Williams, Janz, & Dastmalchian, 2010) has explored how multiple actors can take on different roles over time. Davis and Eisenhardt (2011), for instance, investigated how leaders, through 'rotating leadership', mobilise participants across organisational boundaries to increase innovation performance. The authors used an inductive, multi-case study of eight (pseudonymous) technology collaborations between 10 organisations in the global computing and communications industries. The

research setting was large technical leaders in these industries offering a wide range of information technology products. According to the authors, this organisational field is a particularly appropriate research site because it calls for multiple opportunities for innovation, requiring collaboration across sector boundaries between organisations.

Additionally, in a recent meta-analysis that used 50 effect sizes from both published and unpublished studies (team $N = 3,198$), D'Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger (2016) provided supported for the positive relationship between collective (shared) leadership and team performance.

A criticism of distributed leadership is that the capabilities and contributions of those involved are often not recognised (Hewlett, Luce, & West, 2005). Moreover, Western (2013) stressed how distributing power and control from the centre to the edges in some cases creates great anxiety and chaos, which paradoxically often requires a 'Messiah leader[4]' to initiate, provoke, and stimulate change and be prepared to let go of power when successful. In relation to this research, how democratic corporate leadership structures of distributed leadership apply in nondemocratic countries such as China is yet to be explored.

2.2.6 Followers

Ladkin (2006) argued that understanding leadership is to acknowledge how leaders and followers coproduce and sustain each other. According to Ladkin (2006), leaders and followers have, in the literature, tended to be seen as dualist opposites, with the main focus on the leader. However, because of the rise of interest in dispersed leadership and autonomous teams, followership gained importance and the dualistic approach was challenged. Collinson (2006) agreed:

> '… rejecting the common stereotype of followers as timid, docile sheep, these writers argue that in the contemporary context of greater team working, 'empowered, knowledge workers', and 'distributed' and 'shared' leadership, 'good followership skills' have never been more important' (Collinson, 2006: Introduction).

[4] Western (2013) describes the "Messiah leader" as a charismatic and visionary individual or team, to drive change and create collaborative cultures.

Meindl (1995) emphasised that attempts to diminish the agency of a leader and assert that of the follower, if anything, 'raises up the leader'. Grint (2005) argued that the power of a given leader is more a consequence of the actions of the followers than the cause of it.

In a recent study, Bastardoz and Van Vugt (2018) argued that the core focus of leadership should be on the followers because of the argument that there can be no leaders without followers. Through an analysis of followership from an evolutionary perspective, they concluded that followership evolved as a strategy for solving a range of cooperation and coordination problems in groups. Bastardoz and Van Vugt further argued that followership styles result from relative pay-offs from the leader, adaptive goals pursued by followers, adaptive leadership challenges, and the prevailing leadership style.

The literature on followership is relatively sparse, and more research and deeper exploration have been called for (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). In relation to this dissertation, whether Chinese managers follow the leadership and leadership development strategies from their headquarters remains to be explored. Moreover, to what extent managers take on leadership roles, produce leadership, or at other times neither follow nor lead in accordance with the desired behaviour is yet to be examined.

2.2.7 Post-Modern Leadership

Moving into the twenty-first century, several researchers (e.g., Collins, 2001; Khurana, 2002) have challenged the value of leadership, observing that 'celebrity bosses' were responsible for the rapid and radical changes that cause initiative fatigue and organisational destabilisation. Huy (2001) dismissed the role of visionary leadership and argued that it is middle managers who achieve the balance between change and continuity, as well as that radical change imposed from the top makes this difficult. Khurana (2002) was sceptical of the popular stereotype of the 'heroic' leader who wins the confidence of investors, defeats overwhelming competition, and turns around dying companies.

Khurana (2002) offered four points of criticism of such figures:

1. They 'reject' limits to their scope and authority, rebel against all checks on their power, and dismiss the norms and rules that apply to others.
2. They rely on a widespread quasi-religious belief in the powers of charismatic leaders, which allows them to exploit the irrational desires of their followers.
3. They encourage the attribution error of understanding success in terms of the actions of prominent leaders, whilst overlooking the interplay of social, economic, and other impersonal forces that shape and constrain even the most heroic individual efforts.
4. New chief executives often deliberately destabilise their organisations to foster revitalisation. However, this can be harmful, as a number of corporate scandals in the early twenty-first century illustrated.

(Khurana, 2002)

Khurana (2002) consequently described the transformational leader as a 'dangerous curse'. Instead, in this approach, effective leadership centres on competent managers with skills in change agency, and not heroic visionaries with charismatic personalities. In the following quote, Khurana (2002) demonstrates how this post-modern leadership paradigm perceives itself in direct opposition to what I earlier described as 'new leadership':

> '… what makes a successful leader? When people describe the qualities that enable a CEO to lead, the word they use most often is "charisma." Biographers and journalists have spilled much ink trying to deconstruct the charisma of superstar CEOs such as Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, and Steve Jobs (…) In researching CEO successions in large U.S. companies over the last half dozen years, (…) I have concluded that the widespread quasi-religious belief in the powers of charismatic leaders is problematic for a number of reasons. First, faith exaggerates the impact that CEOs have on companies. Second, the idea that CEOs must have charisma leads companies to overlook many promising candidates and to consider others who are unsuited for the job. Finally, charismatic leaders can destabilize organizations in dangerous ways' (Khurana, 2002, pp. 2–3).

Khurana's definition (Khurana, 2002; Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005) of leadership derives from the field of linguistics and discourse (e.g., Rousseau, 1993; Terkel, 1972), supporting the argument that 'leadership research went awry when the

concept of leadership became decoupled from the notion of meaning and inextricably tied to a concern with performance' (Podolny et al., 2005, p. 30). From a post-modern perspective (e.g., Fairhurst, 2007; Pye, 2005), leadership must always be negotiated, is always partial, is socially constructed through language, and focuses on the symbolic and virtual realm. Notably, this backslash against 'new leaders' challenges the earlier understanding of leadership and management. As described in *Section 2.2.1*, Kotter (1990) emphasised the importance of leadership and consigned management to a lesser role. This argument is now reversed with the argument that leaders can be dangerously destabilising whilst managers effectively drive change. Consequently, such a view on leadership is consistent with scholars of critical management (e.g., Ezzamel & Willmott, 2016; Parker & Parker, 2017) (see *Section 2.2.1*).

The debate regarding leadership versus management is ongoing and consists of conflicting findings. A few studies (e.g., Lieberson & O'Connor, 1972; Weiner, 1986) have quantitatively investigated what impact the transformational leader has on company performance, using a sequential decomposition of variance to explain which factors account for the variance in profit margins. Due to the inconsistency in these studies, this research has only compounded the confusion surrounding the debate. This debate caused Schedlitzki and Edwards (2018) to suggest that the terms 'leadership' and 'management' often refer to the same concept but using different words. Mintzberg (2013) went on to argue that, in a modern context, it is impossible to be an effective leader without also managing; and vice versa, it is impossible to be an effective manager without demonstrating leadership. Above all, it is evident in the literature that the terms 'management' and 'leadership' are interdependent, overlapping at times, and interchangeably interlinked. In other words, the conceptualisation we have of management and the expectations we have of a manager change along with our conceptualisation of effective leadership. For this reason, a description of the fundamental ideas about management is presented in the following chapter.

2.2.8 Summary

This part of the chapter reviewed theories and research on modern leadership, which was divided into six empirical categories. This review illustrated that one superior method of conceptualising leadership does not exist, and the definition of the term may differ

significantly between people and cultures. Consequently, when developing leadership in a given organisation, it is crucial to clearly articulate how the term is conceptualised as well as be aware of the pros and cons of the choice, because this has critical implications for its educational practice. Moreover, in this chapter, various conceptualisations of leadership were observed to have different expectations for the role of management. Hence, the two terms often overlap and are impossible to definitively separate. Notably, most of the studies mentioned in this section have been conducted in a Western context, and not much research has examined to what extent Chinese employees conceptualise leadership with reference to any of the abovementioned paradigms. I propose that such research is required to understand how leadership in China is developed effectively.

2.3 Chinese Leadership Philosophies and Practices

More than 8,000 years ago, the primary religious belief in China was a form of shamanism (Chen & Lee, 2008a; Xu, 1991), which was based on the spiritual belief of a shaman who could connect the inner and outer worlds, the body with the soul, and the living with the dead. Over time, Confucianism and Daoism developed out of shamanism as two fundamental Chinese belief systems, and have influenced, shaped, and affected Chinese behaviour and thinking for thousands of years (Hsu, 1981). When the Zhou dynasty (841–256 BCE) began to break up, creating competing states in the country, chaotic political and social changes began to emerge (Chen & Lee, 2008a). Along with these changes, many schools of thought arose, hereunder Confucianism, Daoism, and the school of military arts philosophy known as the '100 Schools of Thought' (Fung, 1948, pp. 30–37; Lee, 2000, p. 1066). Each separate school (*jia*) was led by its own master (*zi*), with academics and disciples to study and teach philosophical and ideological perspectives, often functioning as advisors for rulers on societal issues such as how to expand power and restore order (Chen & Lee, 2008a).

This section reviews central philosophies within Chinese leadership. Because of China's ancient and comprehensive history (Fung, 1948, pp. 30–37; Lee, 2000, p. 1066), the reviewed literature was selected in light of what leading scholars have found to be the most influential for Chinese business people today. In this section, I first outline three central leadership philosophies: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. Second, I

highlight four central themes, which, according to researchers in the field, have influenced leadership and leadership development in modern China.

2.3.1 Confucianism

Researchers (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008b; Meyer, 2014) have argued that Confucianism has had a central influence on the values underlying modern Chinese society. According to such studies, reminiscences and influences of Confucianism can be seen in politics, education, psychology, morality, ethics, and leadership. This subsection highlights how Confucian leadership can be understood and what consequences it has for Chinese business culture. The three main areas within Confucianism relevant to this study are: (1) leadership; (2) hierarchy and collectivism; and (3) care and guanxi.

2.3.1.1 Leadership

Confucianism describes man as inherently part of a social fabric, wherein the maintenance of social harmony is essential (Hennig, 2017). To ensure harmony, Confucianism emphasises two major principles: *wu lun* (五伦) and *wu chan* (五常) (Wang, Tee, & Ahmed, 2012, p. 509). *Wu lun* describes the 'five cardinal relationships', which are the relationships between: ruler and subordinate; father and son; husband and wife; elder an younger brother; and that among friends (Ip, 2009, p. 466). *Wu chang,* on the other hand, represents Confucius' 'five constants'[5]: (1) humanness or benevolence (*rén;* 仁); (2) righteousness or justice (*yì;* 義); (3) propriety or the proper rite (*lǐ*; 礼); (4) wisdom (*zhì;* 智); and (5) trustworthiness or integrity (*xìn;* 信) (Wang et al., 2012, p. 509).

The 'Five Constants' are meant to 'nurture an individual's inner character and further their ethical maturation' (Wang et al., 2012, p. 509) and are accompanied by the second set of virtues, *si zi* (四字), which are: loyalty (*zhong;* 忠,), filial piety (*xiao;* 孝); moderation (*jie;* 節); and again righteousness (*yi;* 義) (Wang et al., 2012).

[5] The first three are the so-called 'mega virtues'. Number 4 and 5 is an additional set of two extra virtues.

Central to Confucian leadership is the idea of a morally superior person, referred to as *Junzi,* who leads the way towards morality and justice in society (Romar, 2002). According to Ip (2009), the Confucian ideal of *Junzi* is considered a role model for exemplary behaviour and unites the abovementioned virtues. Hennig (2017) argued that the Confucian values that are particularly relevant for business contexts are loyalty (*zhong)*, moderation (*jie)*, honesty and cleanliness (*lian)*, a sense of right and wrong *(chi)*, respectfulness (*gong)*, and modesty (*rang)*.

2.3.1.2 Hierarchy and collectivism

An organisation oriented towards Confucian values requires clear hierarchical structures, and thus builds upon a strict top-down approach to power (Hennig, 2017). Confucian scholars (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008b; Hennig, 2017) have argued that such hierarchical structures produce dependence and a more clearly defined scope of actions, which are particularly helpful in regulating social actions, such as assigning roles and duties to particular positions.

Robertson, Olson, Gilley, and Bao (2008) emphasised that Confucianism generally fosters two tendencies, hierarchy and collectivism, which together constitute what they termed 'vertical collectivism'. Herrmann-Pillath (2015) acknowledged the aspects of hierarchy and community and defined this as 'relational individualism' (Herrmann-Pillath, 2015, p. 245). According to these definitions, Confucian authoritarianism and hierarchical structure do not necessarily contradict the individual's autonomy. On the contrary, autonomy is an explicit objective in Confucianism and one of the central aims of its educational processes (Herrmann-Pillath, 2015). The combination of autonomy and a hierarchical structure led Ip (2009, p. 465) to describe collectivism in Confucianism as a 'familial collectivism' (Ip, 2009, p. 465), which evolved because of the three inner-familiar relationships proposed in *wu lun*, where authoritarianism and paternalism also play a role (Ip, 2009).

The hierarchical relationships expressed in *wu lun* together with the specific collectivism inherent in Confucianism are linked to the cardinal virtue *li* and prevent 'the tendency of individualism' (Lin, Ho, & Lin, 2013, p. 100). Collective success requires that everyone involved knows his or her position, role, and tasks within a process, and applies 'proper attitudes and knowledge to its completion' (Romar, 2002, p. 122). Here, moral autonomy and individual responsibility are vital virtues, because collective success also

inevitably builds upon individual contributions. Therefore, the willingness of each individual employee to conduct assigned tasks and responsibilities is critical to the overall collective success (Romar, 2002, p. 119). However, this structure can only work if a hierarchical structure and harmony exist. Maintaining harmony in hierarchical societal structures is consequentially an inherent part of Confucian philosophy. Only if authority is respected and acknowledged can harmony be achieved (Lin et al., 2013).

2.3.1.3 Care and the guanxi network

Whilst Confucianism first and foremost focuses on the individual leader, the Confucian leader simultaneously has a strong interest in his or her subordinates' welfare (Hennig, 2017). This is the positive side of the paternal dimension inherent in Confucianism. Various scholars (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008b; Hennig, 2017) have argued that Confucian leadership involves genuine care that is not only professionally related but also resembles that of a parent in many ways. Thus, Confucian leaders take responsibility for their subordinates' wellbeing and care about them inside and outside of work as a parent would—leniently and magnanimously. In return, Confucian leaders can expect loyalty and obedience from their subordinates (Cheung & Chan, 2005).

This reciprocal and interdependent social contract of power has been subject to various studies (e.g., Chu & Ju, 1993; Xin & Pearce, 1996) and has often been linked to the concept of '*guanxi'*. Whilst studies have revealed complex differences in the way *guanxi* is utilised, it is most commonly referred to as a '(…) friendship with implications of a continual exchange of favours' (Wood, Whiteley, & Zhang, 2001, p. 263). Yeung and Tung (1996) researched the differences between *guanxi* and the Western view of friendship and networking, and found fundamental differences between networking in China and the West, such as in motives, the nature of reciprocation, the use of power differentiation, the nature or source of power, and the sanctions employed (as a result of the different concepts). Similar findings have caused scholars (e.g., Bond, 1986; Smith & Leung, 1997) to suggest that the concept of *guanxi* represents a structural and formal business practice influenced by Chinese heritage, including Chinese political history, religion, and philosophical underpinnings, such as the *wu lun* and familial piety (Bond, 1986; Xin & Pearce, 1996). The operation of a *guanxi* network might be either beneficial or harmful to the operation of a firm and is considered crucial in the context

of impersonal business dealings within legal and regulatory environments (Chen & Lee, 2008b; Xin & Pearce, 1996). In such an environment, business dealings are likely to rely more on the context of individual relationships than on legal representations, whereas a *guanxi* network (in some cases) can become a breeding ground for nepotism and factionalism in an institution (Wood et al., 2001; Putnam, 2003). For example, Chu and Ju (1993) stated that approximately 70% of 2,000 Chinese respondents affirmed the importance of *guanxi*. In this study, the respondents preferred using *guanxi* to bureaucratic channels to solve problems and advance personal interests.

2.3.2 Daoism

According to Bai and Morris (2014), the principles of the ancient Daoist (or Taoist) philosophy are highly relevant for understanding leadership styles and behaviour in modern business environments in China. Additionally, Hennig (2017) argued that Daoism, next to Confucianism, is the most influential philosophical strand within Chinese management and leadership. However, how far Daoist thought remains prevalent in Chinese business leadership today cannot be answered with absolute certainty. Because the complexity of the concept and the fact that numerous cross-cultural studies in China have been dominated by Confucianism, China has often been said to be rooted in Confucianism (Hennig, 2017; Lin et al., 2013). By contrast, other scholars (Herrmann-Pillath, 2015; Xing & Sims, 2012) have asserted that the cultures of Chinese organisations generally present quite a complex situation, and consequently cannot be reduced to the influence of Confucianism alone. In fact, Tian (2008) suggested that contemporary business life is more affected by the philosophy of Daoism than by Confucianism. In the following subsections, three essential themes related to Daoism are highlighted: (1) the historical impact of Daoism; (2) the fundamental logic of Daoism; and (3) leadership and the nature of Dao.

2.3.2.1 The history of Daoism

Daoist philosophy is the oldest belief system in China and one of the oldest in the world (Davis, 2004). Daoism began to be codified during the *Chou (Zhou)* Dynasty (1122–225 BCE), especially during the ‘Warring States Period’ (475–221 BCE). During this time,

the two greatest works of Daoism—*Tao Te Ching (Tsu, 1972)* and *Chuang Tzu* (Tzu, 2007)—were compiled. It was also during this time that Sun Tzu (Giles, 2008) wrote his Daoist classic on strategy, *The Art of War*. Countless scholars have drawn inspiration and guidance from these books for more than 2,000 years and the *Tao Te Ching* is the most translated work in the world after the Bible and *Bhagavad Gita* (Chen & Lee, 2008b; Davis, 2004).

Daoist sages served as advisors to Chinese rulers at all levels. Moreover, many Chinese leaders—particularly during the *T'ang* Dynasty (618–906 CE), the golden age of Chinese culture—were Daoist adepts who attempted to apply the principles of Daoism to their rule. Thus, the philosophy of Dao provided guidance in politics, military affairs, the arts, medicine, and agricultural practices. According to Bai and Roberts (2011), Daoism is the foundation of the philosophical Chinese civilization in premodern times. In more recent years, Daoism has also been the main source of belief and culture, or 'wisdom', for a considerable proportion of Chinese people (Bai & Morris, 2014). For example, Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution was known for his knowledge of Daoism as well as his masterful use of its principles in formulating the military and political strategies that helped him defeat the more powerful army of the Nationalist Party (Ibid.). Similarly, Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic theory of 'black cat, white cat', which guided his economic reform programme and led to China's economic miracle, was consistent with Daoist thinking (Bai, 2012). Chairman Deng's motto 'It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice' (Li, 1977, p. 107) may best sum up the replacement of fitting government actions into predetermined definitions of 'communism' or 'socialism' and instead applying a pragmatic focus on applying what works. In general, China's economic reform demonstrated Daoist methods in the use of both planning and market mechanisms, as well as the way it embraced different political and economic systems (Bai & Morris, 2014).

Daoist philosophy is the consolidation of concepts and practices that help one to live in harmony (Davis, 2004). Daoist practices include traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture, diet, meditation, breathing practices, physical exercises, the use of herbs, *T'ai chi ch'uan (taijiquan)*, and fine arts (such as calligraphy, poetry, and painting), as practiced by millions throughout the world to enhance health and longevity and as a means of personal cultivation (Ibid.). The Daoist-virtue ethical framework has been utilised for thousands of years in China as a guide for selecting and cultivating leaders

(Bai & Roberts, 2011). Hence, when exploring leadership development practices in China today, investigating this ancient approach and its underlying logic is worthwhile.

2.3.2.2 The fundamental logic of Daoism

Fundamentally, the Daoist philosophy suggests that everything is comprised of a combination of two coexisting yet opposing forces in the universe (Bai & Morris, 2014). These two forces, *yin* and *yang*, depend on each other for existence; neither can exist without the other. *Yin* represents feminine energy, intuition, softness, contraction, and yielding, whereas *Yang* represents masculine energy, rational thought, hardness, expansion, and assertiveness (Davis, 2004). Both contain elements of the other; there is some *yin* within *yang*, and some *yang* within *yin*. Each merges into the other; as *yin* reaches its extreme state, it becomes *yang*, and vice versa. The balance between the two exists at the still point in the centre of their interplay and is crucial for ensuring harmony (Davis, 2004; Hennig, 2017). Thus, everything that exists is in a cyclical process of eternal change, and each stage of this process demonstrates different features of its nature (Bai & Morris, 2014; Yu & Yu, 2005). Jensen (1992) described this process as follows:

> 'Yin and yang represent the negative and positive dualism existing within all things, from the electrons and protons of the atoms to the unconscious and conscious of the human psyche. Yet they are not considered opposites at all, but interdependent polarities that bring all of existence into being' (Jensen, 1992, p. 154).

One of the central themes in Daoism is the management of paradoxes (Davis, 2004). A paradox is defined as something that at first glance may seem absurd or contradictory, but in fact both opposites may be true (Davis, 2004; Jensen, 1992).

According to Daoist philosophy, the interplay of polar opposites maintains a state of balanced tension as one phenomenon in cyclic movements flows into the other—day and night, hot and cold, tight and loose, positive and negative, expansion and contraction, and so forth (Davis, 2004). This process is fundamental to nature and underlies all human endeavours (Hennig, 2017). The emphasis on understanding and managing change has consequently led scholars (e.g., Bai & Morris, 2014; Davis, 2004) to suggest that the Daoist philosophy is particularly suitable in modern global high-paced and

complex business environments where handling and leading change is of paramount importance.

2.3.2.3 Leadership and the nature of Dao

In Daoism, leadership is described as the use of power and social influence to direct or change behaviour, first of oneself and thereafter others (Davis, 2004). Davis (2004) went on to state that this power is a type of energy (leadership *ch'i*) that flows through the network of the organisation, and leadership *ch'i* follows the paths or circuits that have been created in this network to be channelled. When channels are blocked, too much leadership energy accrues on one side of the blockage, and not enough flows to the other side. Like a dam that blocks the flow of water, one side has too much and the other side has too little. Blockages must be removed so that leadership energy can flow to where it is required.

Daoist business culture is generally characterised by the principles of 'non-action' (*wu wei)*, reversion, and softness (Hennig, 2017). *Wu wei* leadership implies 'leading from below', for instance, through leading by example as opposed to strict top-down control (Hennig, 2017). It is less directive and controlling, more empowering, and the environment is productive without constant prompts and interference (Cheung & Chan, 2008). Thus, the leader makes use of so-called 'soft tactics' such as persuasion, empowerment, teamwork, and collaboration to foster a productive atmosphere and creativity (Wang et al., 2012). Gerstner (2011) stated that the application of *wu wei* highly values an environment with an engaging atmosphere, where employees feel supported with regard to their efforts and enjoy a certain freedom in terms of their respective work attitudes and modes. Leaders acting in accordance with *wu wei* are calm and peaceful and do not claim credit for their actions (Lin et al., 2013).

Generally, power and leadership are emphasised in Daoism as the facilitation of human relations and social structures (Wang et al., 2012). Modesty and forbearance together create an atmosphere of cooperation, equality, and harmony, which are crucial conditions in the Daoist perception of leadership (Hennig, 2017). Bai and Morris (2014) argued that Daoist leaders possess loving and caring characteristics that provide energy, which will build charisma and encourage the development of various talents among followers. In return, the employees will praise the leader as charismatic and will

attribute organisational successes to the leader's benevolent and caring behaviour. The mutual effort of the leader and followers establishes a network of care and trust, which in Daoist leadership philosophy is a central factor for success (Bai & Morris, 2014; Jensen, 1992).

Various scholars (e.g., Bai & Morris, 2014; Chen & Lee, 2008b) have argued that an enhanced understanding of Daoism can contribute positively to modern leadership studies in China. From a Daoist perspective, leadership is a phenomenon that exists in human society and is constructed upon relationships between people. The fundamental rule of Daoism requires a dynamic, balanced, and interdependent relationship between internal competing polar forces.

This literature review enables the identification of a series of dialectical relationships in leadership, such as:

- Heroic versus distributed leadership.
- Management focused on increasing productivity versus ethical, political, and sustainable business responsibilities.
- Top-down versus bottom-up leadership.
- Manager versus leader.
- Leadership versus followership.
- Contextual versus static trait leadership.
- Showing care versus being a dictator.

Exploring to what extent the principles of Daoism in such dialectical relationships influence the perception of leadership and leadership development among Chinese and Western employees in global companies is vital.

2.3.3 Legalism

Various scholars (e.g., Hwang, 2008; Ma & Tsui, 2015) have proposed that the philosophy of legalism has had crucial implications on the manner in which Chinese people conceptualise leadership today. Han Fei Tzu (280–233 BCE), the supreme exponent of Legalism, lived approximately 300 years after Confucius in a period characterised by chaos and war between the many Chinese kingdoms (Ma & Tsui,

2015). All the kingdoms were expected to obey the King of Zhou, and military power rather than moral merit determined which kingdoms managed to survive in battles (Ibid.) During this period, through tight authoritarian control and laws, legalism became a key element in the unification of China as a centralised empire (Rindova & Starbuck, 1997). The main themes related to legalism addressed in this chapter are laws, power, and control.

2.3.3.1 Laws, power, and control

Hanfei proposed three elements required to rule a kingdom successfully: (1) *Shi* ('momentum' or retaining power); (2) *Shu* ('method' or implementing, controlling, and monitoring); and(3) *Fa* ('law' or regulations and policies) (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Legalism generally argues that because people avoid punishable behaviours, an effective leader should establish and publicise rigorous rules and laws that apply to everyone except him or herself (Hwang, 2008). In return, subordinates will behave in an orderly fashion (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Legalism scholars (e.g., Liao, 1959; Watson, 1913) have highlighted that top leaders alone must hold power, especially over reward and punishment, and consequently, to implement laws reliably, leaders must monitor their managers effectively. If employees perform well, leaders share the glory; if employees perform poorly, leaders can assign blame and punishments (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Unlike Confucians, Legalists had no interest in preserving the moral values of the past; their only goal was to offer advice to the ruler on how to survive and prosper through measures of administrative reform, such as strengthening the central government, enforcing military training, and increasing food production (Hwang, 2008). Moreover, again in strong contrast to Confucianism, under Legalism everyone must receive equal punishment for breaking laws, no matter their relationship with the leader (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Fundamentally, Legalism is based on an axiom that coincides with the following modern economic assumption: every individual has selfish and rational desires and agendas (Rindova & Starbuck, 1997).

2.3.4 Themes in Modern Chinese Leadership

Based on 35 interviews with Chinese CEOs, Chen and Lee (2008b) suggested that modern Chinese leaders draw inspiration and guidance not only from traditional Chinese philosophies and role models but also from Western management and business role models. Thus, modern Chinese leadership theories and practices seem to be eclectically constructed with threads from various traditional Chinese and modern Western philosophies. Therefore, current Chinese business leadership and management may be characterised as the coexistence of multiple philosophies, perspectives, and approaches, some of which are different and even conflicting, whereas others are similar and complementary (Chen & Lee, 2008b). This section outlines four of the themes in modern Chinese leadership philosophies proposed by Chen and Lee (2008b) that are relevant to the present study.

2.3.4.1 Chinese humanism

The first theme in modern Chinese leadership is (Chinese) humanism. It is a central point of Wei-Ming (1998) that 'Chinese humanism' is diametrically opposed to the humanism that was a distinctive feature of the enlightenment mentality of the modern West. Western humanism emerged as a thorough critique of spiritualism as a result of secularisation, whereas Chinese humanism tended to incorporate the spiritual and naturalist dimensions into an integrated vision of the nature and function of humanity in the cosmos (Ibid). Chen and Lee (2008b) argued that Western humanist philosophy of management places greater emphasis on the autonomy, agency, and rights of individual employees, Chinese humanist management theory stresses human-heartedness in the employee's relationship with other fellow beings. House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) found that benevolence towards employees does not seem to be as morally compelling in Western conceptions of leadership as it does in Chinese ones.

2.3.4.2 Moral character of the leader

The second theme emphasises the moral character of the leader, which is in fundamental alignment with the Daoist and Confucian leadership discussed earlier in this chapter. According to Chen and Lee (2008b), the high tolerance for a leader's autonomy in modern Chinese business environments is matched and balanced by the high moral

standards expected of leaders. Whereas Western transformational leadership theories emphasise the leader's ability to transform followers' self-interests into the collective interest of the organisation (e.g., Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), Chinese leadership philosophies generally emphasise self-transformation of the leader as a prerequisite for organisational transformation (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008b; Giles, 2008). Confucianism explicitly holds 'double' moral standards that are higher for leaders than for followers, and higher for high-positioned leaders than for low-positioned ones (Chen & Lee, 2008b). Similarly, a theme repeated throughout Sun Tzu's *Art of War* (Gagliardi, 2007; Giles, 2008) is the emphasis on self-development among generals. According to Sun Zhu, it is necessary for a leader to develop individual courage, morals, knowledge, and strength within him/herself before being able to take on the role of leader over others (Giles, 2008).

2.3.4.3 Dialecticism and holism

The third theme in modern Chinese leadership relevant to this dissertation is the one of 'dialecticism and holism'. Whilst the holistic and dialectic beliefs of the Chinese can be attributed to the complex social relationships and systems of Confucian societies (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001), they have also played a central role in Daoism (Chen & Lee, 2008b). Daoist *yin* and *yang* thinking has influenced multiple areas of Chinese culture, such as medicine, philosophy, and martial arts (e.g., Lee & Hu, 1993; Peng & Nisbett, 1999), as well as schools of thought such as Sun Tzu's strategic leadership (Giles, 2008) and Mao's theory of contradiction (Tse-Tung, 1960). Although a fundamental contrast exists between the holistic views of the Chinese and the analytical views in the West, Daoist *yin* and *yang* reasoning is in many ways similar to the Hegelian idea that everything involves its own negation, as in the Hegelian dialectic logic (Hegel, 1982). However, relative to Western logic, Daoist *yin–yang* reasoning involves an idea state of the middle and the harmonious coexistence of opposites, which according to Chen and Lee (2008b) has influenced the perception of leadership and leadership development among modern Chinese leaders.

2.3.4.4 Leadership agency

The final theme is that of the leader as agent of action and change. Researchers in social psychology (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morris & Peng, 1994) have found that the Chinese conception of the (individual) self is oriented more towards interdependence than independence. This suggests a more holistic than analytical type of cognition, resulting in a less rigid and more open model of Chinese leadership. However, in a more recent study, Brewer and Chen (2007) found all three types of self-conception (individualist, relational, and collectivist selves) to be present in Chinese individuals. Therefore, further research is required to explore the complexity of Chinese (employees') conceptions of self and leadership agency.

2.4 Leadership Development in China and the West

Since the 1980s, scholars (e.g., Hill, 1992; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988) have adopted a wide variety of scientific approaches towards better understanding leadership development. Although notable advances have been made, the work has progressed in a somewhat arbitrary manner, resulting in a lack of shared understandings of basic terms, definitions, theoretical orientations, and other conceptual measurement considerations (Day & Dragoni, 2015). According to Reichers and Schneider (1990), this is a typical sign of a scientific discipline in its early stages. This literature review consequently aims to constructively reflect on the progress made to date and offer ideas for how to further stimulate advancements.

This section outlines the research on leadership development. Such a conceptual framework is useful when understanding and analysing the pedagogical approaches that foreign companies adopt when training leaders in their Chinese organisations. The first part of the section focuses on leadership development from a Western perspective. In particular, the review distinguishes between leader development and leadership development. Second, I describe how workplace learning has developed in China, as well as discuss the country's long tradition of education and learning. Moreover, I present a discussion on how the ongoing tension between foreign and Chinese knowledge and methods of education has influenced leadership and management education in Chinese business schools. Finally, I outline what the research conducted on alternative workplace learning offers to leadership development in China.

2.4.1 Leadership Development in the West

Although contemporary global organisations increasingly prioritise investing in developing the leadership capabilities of their employees (Schwartz, Bersin, & Pelster, 2014), Day and Dragoni (2015) stated that research on this topic is still in the early stage of scientific development. However, throughout the fairly short history of rigorous scholarly theory and research, the distinction between 'leader development' and 'leadership development' has been crucial (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). Leader and leadership development both generally: '(…) focus on efforts aimed at expanding individual and collective capacity to be effective in leadership roles and to bring about effective leadership' (Day & Dragoni, 2015, p. 134). The study of 'leader development', however, mainly focuses on the acquisition of individual knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, and enhanced holistic functioning, which enhance effective leadership and are attached to formally appointed roles (Drath et al., 2008; Kotter, 2001). 'Leadership development', on the other hand, is considered a social influence process involving the ability to enhance individual and collective abilities to engage in leadership (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010).

In addition, Day et al. (2014) argued that a reason why leadership theory and research have contributed little to leadership development is connected to a long-standing focus on linking personality with leadership. Because of the tradition of scholars conceptualising leadership in terms of traits that summarise relatively enduring dispositional tendencies (House, Shane, & Herold, 1996), the purpose of studying development (i.e., change) becomes irrelevant. Similarly, behavioural approaches have been limited in their developmental usefulness because of their primary intervention focus on leadership behaviours based on training, rather than on longer-term development initiatives (Day et al., 2014). Throughout this research, training has typically involved providing proven approaches to solve known problems; however, the challenges facing contemporary leaders tend to be too complex to be addressed successfully through such relatively short-term training interventions (Ibid.). Consequently, the fields of leader and leadership development have focused less on leadership theory and more on developmental science (e.g., Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; DeRue, Nahrgang, & Ashford, 2015). In other words, in the literature on

leadership development, a change in focus away from leadership research and towards understanding and enhancing the developmental processes has occurred.

To constructively reflect on relevant research and offer ideas to further advancements, the following two subsections review the literature on leader and leadership development.

2.4.1.1 Leader development

Scholars on leader development (e.g., Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, & Krueger, 2007; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004) have argued that individuals begin their respective leadership journeys with predisposed levels of leadership ability. Through a systematic review of theoretical and empirical developments in the leadership literature, Leary and Tangney (2003) concluded that self-views, in the form of one's self-construal, have critical influences on individual emotions, cognitions, and behaviours. This view was supported by Day et al. (2009) and Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002), who highlighted that self-views in terms of leadership leader self-efficacy, self-awareness, and leader identity consequently are key concerns of the leader development process.

Self-efficacy

Quigley (2013) examined the development of leadership efficacy in MBA teams, adopting a longitudinal, multilevel perspective on individuals and teams involved in a 4-day business simulation. The results suggested that extraversion and cognitive ability predicted initial levels of leadership self-efficacy, whereas personality factors such as emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness to experience were found to predict changes in leadership efficacy over time. Moving forward with research on self-efficacy within the context of leader development, Day and Dragoni (2015) emphasised that a greater consensus is required with regard to the conceptualisation of the construct. They argued that this is a critical topic, not only in the interest of consistent science but also in terms of understanding where to practically focus leader development initiatives.

Self-awareness

To understand the function of leader development, Reilly, Dominick, and Gabriel (2014) considered self-awareness a central component. Self-awareness is generally related to possessing a deep understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, preferences, and insights into the interpersonal impact one has on others (McCauley et al., 2010). In workplace contexts, self-awareness has often been trained using methods such as 360° feedback analysis provided by various rating sources, such as the self, subordinates, peers, and supervisors (e.g., Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010; Seifert & Yukl, 2010). Thus, self-awareness from this perspective has been considered in terms of the congruence between self-ratings and those of others.

Day and Dragoni (2015) highlighted that there is a lack of available evidence to show that participation in leader development initiatives (such as multisource feedback) enhances leaders' self-awareness. Overall, the authors emphasised that research evidence for the assertion that developmental interventions enhance self-awareness is weak or nonexistent. In addition, Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, and Kucine (2003) focused on how leaders can use multisource feedback and whether it improves their leadership effectiveness over time. Through a quasiexperimental field study, they found that working with an executive coach improved various aspects of performance, such as goal setting, soliciting ideas for improvement from others, and improving the direct reporting of a leader's subsequent behaviour. Furthermore, Smither, London, and Reilly (2005) found that the use of feedback improved effectiveness more for some recipients than it did for others, which depended on aspects of the feedback itself and the reactions and beliefs of the feedback targets. Although such research thus can be useful for organisations' professional practice, it does not address the core issue of whether self-awareness is enhanced through leader development interventions. Consequently, Reilly et al. (2014) called for more research in this area.

Leader identity

Gecas (1982) defined identity as the meaning attached to a person by the self and by others. Thus, identity evolves over time as a result of various experiences that allow people to perceive insights into preferences, talents, and values (Lord & Hall, 2005). A

rigorous body of literature exists in the field of leadership and identity (Ibarra, Wittman, Petriglieri, & Day, 2014); however, in this dissertation, I focus on literature that concerns the development of leader identity. A fundamental assumption in much of the research on identity is that the self is not unidimensional and that people develop 'social identities' based on various factors, such as group memberships and social roles, as well as 'personal identities' based on personal characteristics that they display or are attributed to them (Day & Dragoni, 2015). In this manner, leader identity can be formed through social and/or personal factors.

Lord and Hall (2005) argued that leader identity is a particularly crucial component in the leadership development process. They argued this because leader identity has been proven to increase motivation for new leadership skills and further identity development. Such spirals can either be positive or negative, and DeRue and Ashford (2010) stated that the type of spiral is likely to affect people's willingness to participate effectively in leadership processes when required to. Through a longitudinal study of leader development processes among emerging leaders, Day and Sin (2011) found that endorsing a stronger leader identity was positively associated with others' ratings of the target's leadership effectiveness. Their study examined leader identity as a time-varying covariate of development trajectories across four time periods. Moreover, Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) employed a qualitative grounded theory approach and found a gradual shift over 3 years among undergraduate college students. From heroic leader-centric notions of leadership, the students' conceptualisations generally changed, along with their own changing identities, mainly towards more participative conceptualisations of leadership.

Knowledge, skills, and competencies

McCall (2004, 2010) suggested that the most effective method to develop leaders is providing opportunities for acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies in areas such as direction setting, relationship building, change management, and external environment navigation. In recent years, scholars have recognised that work experience consists of a stream of events and activities, where some may be similar and reinforcing, and thus, beneficial for development (Dragoni et al., 2014; Dragoni, Oh, VanKatwyk, & Tesluk, 2011). Examining the accumulation of work experience in predicting the

strategic thinking competency of executives beyond what could be predicted by individual characteristics and other work experiences, Dragoni et al. (2011) found that the cognitive ability of leaders and their accumulated work experience are the most important predictors of strategic thinking competency. Dragoni et al. (2014) specifically explored global work experiences requiring employees to transcend national boundaries, which were found to be critical in the development of strategic thinking competency, especially when leaders gained experiences in countries with quite distinct cultures from their own. Day and Dragoni (2015) further highlighted that an interesting question for future research involves untangling when similar and reinforcing experiences versus those that disrupt current routines are helpful to leaders' development.

Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) asserted that to capitalise on business opportunities stemming from globalisation, international experiences with synthesis across diversity is a vital component of building leaders' competencies to lead across cultural boundaries. Empirical evidence has supported these findings, suggesting that managers' international experience is positively related to their self-assessed global orientation, tolerance for ambiguity, cultural flexibility, and strategic thinking competency (Arora, Jaju, Kefalas, & Perenich, 2004; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012).

Recognising the importance of providing support to developing leaders during critical experiences, scholars (e.g., DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012; McCauley et al., 2010) have empirically explored the notion of support in facilitating leader development. For instance, DeRue et al. (2012) employed a quasiexperimental research design and demonstrated that structured reflection through after-event reviews provided learners with an opportunity to systematically analyse their behaviour and evaluate the contribution of its components to performance outcomes; this was useful for promoting experience-based leader development. The positive effects of these events were high levels of conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and having a varied base of development experiences.

Additional studies (e.g., Dragoni, Park, Soltis, & Forte-Trammell, 2014) have found that supervisors can facilitate leader development among early-career leaders transitioning into new roles in terms of a leader's understanding of the new role and the time he or she allocates to leading others. Supervisor support in the form of modelling effective leadership and providing role information was found to enhance the development of

transitioning leaders. The qualitative work of McCall and McHenry (2014) demonstrated considerable variance in the types of support available to leaders, and led to them suggesting the need to more thoroughly consider the conditions under which different forms of support are most helpful, to whom, and when.

Day and Dragoni (2015) argued that further theoretical and empirical contributions are required to deepen the understanding of leader development. In particular, they urged future researchers to go beyond the focus on developmental order and address the more critical concern of the dynamics underlying developmental movement. According to these authors, this included further research focusing on more complex leadership processes in groups, teams, and organisations. Such research involves further conceptual and empirical work to more effectively integrate these different development-based perspectives on the how and why of individual leader development, especially in terms of conceptualising distal developmental outcomes.

2.4.1.2 Leadership development

Whilst the majority of research in the field has been oriented towards examining factors that enhance the leadership capabilities of individuals in formal roles, Day and Dragoni (2015) emphasised that the study of leadership development is broader than this. Such studies have addressed the growth of leadership within a dyad, unit, or larger collective (Day, 2000). In this section, such dyadic and collective leadership development within units and organisations is reviewed. Because research on leadership development with this focus is in its infancy, scholars have differed in their levels of explicitness in their attempts to inform the area of leadership development. Therefore, the goal of this subsection is to identify a preliminary set of indicators that a collective is developing greater capacity for leadership.

Dyadic and relational perspectives on leadership development

At the dyadic level, leadership development focuses on the broad range of leadership research that has treated leadership as a relationship. When leadership is considered rooted in a relationship, studies on leadership development have consequently been

oriented towards how actors generate clarity of direction, create or cocreate alignment of mindsets and efforts, and build enhanced commitment (Day & Dragoni, 2015).

Uhl-Bien (2006) reviewed the research on leadership grounded in relationships. In such research, the act of relating has been considered more of an individual act that can be enhanced by assessing individual perceptions of the relationship. Howell and Shamir (2005), for instance, researched the relationship between the leader and follower, seeking to explore the characteristics of followers that shape the type of charismatic relationship formed with the leader. Additionally, scholars on leader–member exchange (LMX) have examined the relationship between leaders and followers (e.g., Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). A common finding has been that followers who enjoy a higher quality of relationships with their leaders are more motivated; perform duties outside their formal role descriptions; possess greater clarity about their role; and provide greater organisational commitment. Thus, a fundamental assumption of these studies is that leadership development must be centred towards the quality of the leadership relationship, as well as how it is perceived, to influence alignment and commitment among followers.

Bauer and Green (1996) presented the clearest portrayal of this relationship-building process. They emphasised that an initial attraction is formed between leaders and members who are similar in personality, which inclines leaders to view a particular follower's performance more positively, and thus delegate more work to him or her. Bauer and Green (1996) suggested that leader delegation is a central component for initiating a leader delegation–follower performance cycle that develops broader leadership capacity.

Out of this relational tradition of viewing leadership development, DeRue and Ashford (2010) offered a description of how leadership develops among actors who may or may not hold a formal leadership position within an organisation. With reference to previous scholars on identity construction (e.g., Day & Harrison, 2007; Gardner & Avolio, 1998), the authors presented leadership development as occurring through identity work, during which individuals claim a particular identity and others affirm it. Claims of leadership identity may include directing the work of others or claiming a follower position, and once a mutual recognition emerges of who the leader is and who the follower is, this forms the basis of the leader–follower relationship. Day and Dragoni (2015) stated that

what is particularly intriguing about this account is that it articulates a clear process of social interactions that creates leadership within a particular context. This is opposed to entity perspectives such as LMX that tend to examine only individual perceptions of the process of developing an LMX relationship.

In agreement with Uhl-Bien (2006) and Day and Dragoni (2015), I will not advocate for the primacy of one perspective (i.e., entity or relational) over another. However, I *do* highlight the potential for greater theoretical integration and expansion of these perspectives in advancing the study of leader and leadership development. One method of integrating these perspectives constructively is to draw from entity perspectives to identify the types of people most likely to view leadership as cocreated or as something that is fixed, which would have implications for the claiming/granting process.

Leadership development within teams and organisations

The abovementioned studies have conceptualised leadership development as relationship-based, whereas other scholars have more explicitly emphasised the process of organising and mobilising effort for team or organisational adaptation (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Thus, leadership development is conceptualised as an outcome of a social structure and process, and studies on it seek to gain insights into the conditions that enable leadership processes to emerge and expand overall collective efficacy (Salancik, Calder, Rowland, Leblebici, & Conway, 1975).

Day, Gronn, and Salas (2004) suggested that teams possess the potential to enhance their leadership capacity through leadership development processes, as evidenced by leadership becoming more equally shared or distributed among team members. Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, and Paul (2014) proposed that what is shared or distributed within these leadership structures is power, which is likely to be initiated by those with the most relevant expertise and seen as legitimate by others given the demands of the task. Thus, sharing of leadership requires a certain type of followership where followers view the leader as legitimate. DeRue (2011) further reasoned that variability in the pattern of leading–following interactions creates a structure with opportunities for teams to engage in shared sense-making regarding team challenges, constraints, and prospects, which they can achieve with broader involvement and contribution through adopting various roles. DeRue et al. (2015) and Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) argued that these

forms of learning and team interactions have been shown to be related to higher levels of team performance.

Several scholars (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Edmondson & Lei, 2014) have suggested that shared leadership capacity is enhanced when members feel psychologically safe comfortable voicing their view as well as claim leadership identity. Additionally, Aime et al. (2014) stressed that when team members are knowledgeable of each other's expertise, they are more inclined to share power and leadership within a team. Finally, Carson et al. (2007) indicated the importance of an aligned mindset—regarding the extent to which leadership should be shared and whether the team perceives their purpose as shared—in whether acts of informal leadership are supported and valued.

Researchers (e.g., Argote & McGrath, 1993; Day et al., 2004) have proposed that once facilitating conditions are in place (i.e., psychological safety, knowledge of team members' experience, and shared mindsets), team learning is the most critical factor in the leadership development within teams. Team learning may span a wide range of activities, such as making knowledge accessible and usable among team members, socialising new members, and adapting to external demands (Argote, Gruenfeld, & Naquin, 2001). Until now, leadership development research has tended to emphasise team learning activities that arise when individuals fluidly move in and out of particular team roles to stimulate and support greater information exchange (e.g., Day et al., 2004; DeRue, 2011). Day and Dragoni (2015) indicated that because of this field's early stage of scientific development, the conceptual distinction between team learning and team development is unclear. Team learning is often centred on understanding who knows what in a team and how its members work together (Reagans, Argote, & Brooks, 2005). Although in many cases the study of leadership development possesses some of these elements, its fundamental intent is to examine how to create processes, norms, and/or structures that fuel mutual influence among actors, which can ultimately lead to enhanced direction setting, alignment of mindsets, and shared commitment in work (Day & Dragoni, 2015).

2.4.1.3 Summary

The phenomenon of leadership development is complex and has implications at the individual, dyadic, team, and organisational levels of analysis, as well as longitudinally (Day et al., 2014). The approaches to its study vary widely, which caused Day and Dragoni (2015) to state a need for greater conceptual clarity. Additionally, they suggested that conceptual clarity should be gained by articulating the context in which leadership development is studied. They argued that this would assist more mindful scientific progression. For instance, they highlighted that the leader development of first-line organisational leaders is likely to qualitatively differ from that of more experienced leaders and executives.

2.4.2 Workplace Learning in China

The long and comprehensive workplace education system in China has, as far back as the *Zhou Dynasty* (1046–1256 BC), been run as a mixture of government-owned and private institutions (Goodall & Warner, 2010). Among the most famous and influential academies and private schools were those of Confucius (see Section 2.3.1). In Imperial China, higher education served the purpose of producing both scholars and civil servants who were to become managers and administrators. They were required to pass the Imperial Civil Service exam, which was implemented in 587 and continued until it was abolished in 1905 (Zhou, 2006).

One of the most famous academies was the *Han Lin Academy* in Beijing, which was founded in the eighth century and trained people to perform secretarial, archival, and literary tasks for the court (Twitchett, 1979). Moreover, graduates of this academy established the official interpretation of the works of Confucius, which were the basis of the civil service examination that served as a gateway for entrance to the upper levels of the official bureaucracy (Shils, 1990). Goodall and Warner (2010) argued that the manner in which the country developed a cadre of certified individuals with the knowledge and skills deemed necessary to run a rather large organisation (i.e., through such academies) is not too far removed from the practice the study of MBAs in business schools of today, only with a different set of curricula.

2.4.2.1 Recent history of workplace learning in China

Since the late 1950s, leadership education in China has been characterised by the acceptance as well as resistance of Western influence. China in the late 1950s followed the example of the Soviet Union in offering management training courses in universities and training institutions; however, this was abolished during the 1960s along with numerous other educational activities (Deng & Wang, 1992; Warner, 1992). After the Cultural Revolution, the country experienced a vacuum of human capital to fill the need for new knowledge and economic development, which could not be met by the Chinese state-training system alone (Schlarb, Strause, & Weng, 2018). As a consequence, China started looking elsewhere for inspiration, ideas, technology, capital, and management systems to break away from its decreasing economic and social development (Child, 1994; Warner, 1986).

In 1979, a group of Chinese government officials and academics visited several top business schools in the United States, such as Harvard, MIT, Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, and Indiana. The visits resulted in a summary report that suggested providing similar graduate education in China to people with undergraduate degrees and 5 to 10 years of management experience, to prepare them for future management positions (Goodall & Warner, 2010). Within a year, several universities such as the elitist *Tsinghua* and *Beijing* (Peking) *University* (also called *Beida*) started offering management courses mostly with local materials (Warner, 1992). The majority of their graduates later occupied important positions in the government and large corporations (Goodall & Warner, 2010).

During the 1950s, the Chinese planned economy was characterised by medium-sized and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Wei, 2003). Similar to the Soviet practice, these corporations mainly recruited managers with science and engineering backgrounds rather than those educated in economics and business (Warner, 1992). Along with the opening of the Chinese markets between 1978 and 1987, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, a training programme extending throughout the nation to 8 million applicants on commerce, finance, and trade was opened—nearly two thirds of the total number of managers (Goodall & Warner, 2010). Thus, the need for skills in management, leadership, finance, marketing, international business, and strategy had become ever more imperative in light of the evolving market economy (Schlarb et al., 2018). Goodall

and Warner (2010) further stressed that 'Deng personally encouraged the introduction of what was at the time called "scientific" management, widely seen at the time as a panacea, although versions of Taylorism had surfaced much earlier' (Goodall & Warner, 2010, pp. 17–18). In accordance with the philosophy behind Taylorism[6], factory directors, because of their lack of management experience, underwent a swift training programme, ending in a standardised test, on the skills required to solve their job tasks efficiently (Warner, 1992).

In 1992, a series of short-term training programmes shifted their main focus to 'on-the-job' training (Goodall & Warner, 2010). These 'on-the-job' programmes were implemented to deal with the implications of government reforms in areas such as accounting and taxation, investment, product quality, marketing, and foreign trade (Warner, 1995). However, whilst this training was officially aimed at on-the-job activities, it was mainly done in practise through simply informing managers of changes and helping them to accommodate the new policies (Ibid.). As a consequence, Warner (1995) argued that the quality of most top-level managers in these organisations was not developed sufficiently, resulting in the constrained growth of their enterprises and of the economy as a whole.

In 1995, the State Economic and Trade Commission decided that SOEs would be responsible for providing leadership training for their managers and senior managers, which resulted in training decidedly based on Western MBA-style programmes (Goodall, Warner, & Lang, 2004). Moreover, the government encouraged managers to engage in part-time MBA programmes to deal with the complexity of the twenty-first century (Warner & Goodall, 2010). Additionally, in 1996, the government introduced a national system of certified professional qualifications as a precondition for obtaining a senior manager position (Forrester & Porter, 1999). This resolution directly contributed to the quality of business leaders by providing objective measures for managerial knowledge and competencies and by emphasising the value of MBA education (Ibid.).

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[6] When Frederick W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* was published in 1911, its revolutionary approach to management caught a great amount of public interest (Davis & Blalack, 1975). During the last century, various scholars (e.g., Payne, Youngcourt, & Watrous, 2006; Wrenge & Greenwood, 1991) have acknowledged Taylor as the 'father of scientific management' due to his approach to management based on observation (empirical data collection) and measurement (experimentation) (Taneja, Pryor, & Toombs, 2011).

2.4.2.2 MBA education in China

During the early 1980s, an increasing interest in foreign MBA education began to develop in China. In 1982, the European Community Commission and the Chinese government set up the China-Europe Management Institute (Child & Derong, 2010). With the aim of assisting China to establish a world-class business school, the Commission introduced a special committee responsible for teaching activities, whilst the Economic and Trade Commission of China was made responsible for recruiting and administration (Goodall & Warner, 2010). The courses lasted 2 years, included 24 compulsory courses, and all lectures were conducted in English. Child and Derong (2010) described how this programme followed European MBA teaching methodologies and recruited students every year, leading to six accomplished recruitment cycles by 1996 for a total of 236 participants. In 1994, the training centre moved from Beijing to Shanghai and changed its name to the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) (Cremer, 2010; Frohn, 2010). Cremer (2010) and Frohn (2010) described how a central aim of the CEIBS was to synthesise Eastern and Western management practices, and consequently its faculty was nearly 50% foreign with high-level knowledge of international management as well as Chinese business culture.

Similarly, in 1984, the Chinese government collaborated with the United States Department of Commerce in setting up an MBA Education Center at the Dalian University of Technology. This resulted in a 3-year course with 40 students enrolled every year, including English teaching, MBA theory (mostly case study methods), and internships in American companies (Fischer, 1999; Warner, 1992). Graduates were awarded an MBA degree by the School of Management at SUNY, Buffalo (Goodall & Warner, 2010). In 1989, a task group and *The Economic Trade Commission of China* organised several meetings, including senior participants from Chinese ministries, large corporations, and a state bank, resulting in nine universities and institutions setting up an MBA curriculum and providing the MBA degree (Shi, 2000). A group of professors and representatives from each of the nine universities was formed to standardise teaching quality and between 1992 and 1994 common policies, rules, and a syllabus were agreed (Li, 1996). In 1994, the MBA Education Committee was established under the supervision of the Degree Committee of the State Council of China and the Ministry of Education, and in 1996 a GRK test, a Chinese ‘Graduate Management Aptitude Test’

(GMAT) was used nationwide for MBA entrance examinations (Jelen & Alon, 2005; Zhao, 1997).

By 2004, 90 institutes were offering MBA programmes and some schools, such as Nanjing BS, had a range of undergraduate, MBA, Executive MBA, and PhD programmes in Management (Zhao & Chen, 2010). The *Guanghua School of Management*, originally named *Peking University Business School*, was established in 1993 and offers some of the highest quality programmes available today, and collaborates extensively with top international business schools in Europe and the United States, such as Wharton School, the University of Chicago, Booth Business School, LSE, and Kellogg Graduate School of Management (Guanghua SOM, 2018; QS Rankings Peking, 2018). Tsinghua's MBA programmes are among the most prestigious, offering international collaborations such as the Sloan School of MIT, INSEAD, HEC School of Management, London Business School, and Columbia Business School (QS Rankings Tsinghua, 2018; Tsinghua MBA, 2018). Because of the need to cope with challenges in the Chinese and international business environments, as well as to adjust to economic changes both locally and globally, both Chinese SOEs and private companies have encountered an increasing need for managers to be acquainted with advanced managerial concepts and techniques (Warner & Goodall, 2010). To streamline the curriculum, the Ministry of Education decided to set nine core courses and at least five elective courses in Chinese MBA courses, and candidates were not to obtain their degrees before finishing their final thesis (Goodall & Warner, 2010).

2.4.2.3 Educational alternatives to business schools in China

Another trend in business education in China has been the provision of in-house training. Some initiatives are the *Motorola University* and the *Ericsson China Institute* (Sham, 2007) as well as the *McDonald's Hamburger University* (Bloomberg, 2011). Goodall and Warner (2010) highlighted how the *Motorola University*, established in 1993, was originally intended to deliver extensive technical training in subjects such as six-sigma and more than 170 others to its internal employees, but ended up extending training services to clients, suppliers, and partners. In 2002, Motorola had collaborations with 21 colleges, including Beida, Tsinghua, and Nankai universities, and established five institutes to cover five key topics in management: leadership and management,

quality, marketing, supply chain, and engineering (Shaw, 2005). Similarly, *The Ericsson China Institute* engaged in training for domestic universities such as Fudan and Tsinghua, Western institutions such as Harvard University and MIT, as well as industrial training companies in the field of leadership and business (Goodall & Warner, 2010).

Generally, Goodall and Warner (2010) noted that interest has been a fast-growing in corporate universities in China among large enterprises, such as China Life Assurance and Bank of China, who have made large investments in training and development. The authors emphasised that such investments serve to build corporate brands as well as relations and shared understanding with government officials, customers, and suppliers. Finally, the authors mentioned a fast-growing sector existing of thousands of small private training companies. Many of these simply offered standardised programmes either under license or not, from Europe and the United States. An example of this is Covey's (1989, 2013) '*Seven Habits of Effective People*'. Others have developed alternative training programmes built on traditional Chinese ideas and philosophies, such as the '*I Ching*' (Huang, 2010) and the '*Sun Tzu's The Art of War: For the Management Warrior*' (Gagliardi, 2007).

2.5 Discussion, Conclusions, and Research Questions

2.5.1 Discussion and Conclusions

First, this literature review outlined six empirical paradigms within research on modern leadership. In general, the results from these studies suggest that leadership is experienced as an idea; people attribute meanings, names, structures, forms, and formal and informal social roles to it, as well as to followers (e.g., Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013; Western, 2013). Moreover, the descriptions of the six paradigms showed that leadership is asymmetrical, dynamic, and complex. The present study consequently argues that the manner in which employees conceptualise leadership depends on their social history, their collective socialisation, and the context. Thus, people perform, perceive, enact, and respond to leadership individually and collectively, consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, improving leadership is closely connected with improving peoples' understanding of it (Casimir & Waldman, 2007). When examining cross-cultural leadership development in China, it is thus vital to explore how employees from

collaborating organisations each conceptualise the phenomenon of leadership. Additionally, to understand the optimal learning processes for developing leadership, it is necessary to allow individuals to locate their own perceptions and emotions (personal and cultural) attached to leadership (Western, 2013). This literature review provided a historical overview of how the concept of leadership has been defined by different scholars over the past decades. The aim of this overview was first to identify gaps in the literature to inform the research questions of this study. Second, such a framework of empirical leadership paradigms provides a guideline for the construction of a methodological approach that is capable of mapping and understanding employees' conceptualisations.

Although some scholars (e.g., Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1977) have clearly differentiated between leadership and management, others (e.g., Bass, 1985; Mintzberg, 2005) have described leadership as overlapping with management. During the past decades, the changing requirements of management have challenged the definitions of, and expectations on, effective leadership. In this manner, an increase in complexity in the environment surrounding modern companies has called for more complex management structures internally in organisations (Mintzberg, 2013). This understanding of organisational behaviour resulted in a leadership conception where managers lead and leaders manage and, consequently, the two terms were impossible to separate (Ibid.). However, whilst these paradigm principles aimed to describe the development of leadership in the Western realm, scant literature has taken the Chinese context into account.

Therefore, the second part of the review presented literature on Chinese leadership philosophies. Here, it was argued (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008b; Meyer, 2014) that Confucianism has had a central influence on the values underlying modern Chinese society and business leadership. Central to Confucian leadership is the idea of a morally superior person, *Junzi*, who, as with the principles of 'new leadership', represents a clear hierarchy of exemplary behaviour. However, as opposed to the understanding of hierarchy within 'new leadership', Confucianism emphasises the concept of 'vertical collectivism' (or 'familial collectivism'). Thus, whilst offering hierarchical conditions and authoritarianism similar those seen in 'new leadership, Confucianism simultaneously emphasises—with its three inner-familiar relationships proposed in *wu lun*—something similar to the focus on the employee wellbeing described in 'collective

leadership'. However, the extent to which Confucian philosophy impacts the conceptualisation of effective leadership for Chinese employees in Western companies remains to be examined.

Other scholars (Bai & Morris, 2014; Chen & Lee, 2008b) have asserted that an enhanced understanding of Daoism can contribute positively to modern leadership studies in China. I propose that looking through the lenses of Daoism can include analysing dialectical relationships, such as heroic versus distributed leadership; management focused on increasing productivity versus ethical, political, and sustainable business responsibilities; top-down versus bottom-up leadership; manager versus leader; leadership versus followership; contextual versus static trait leadership; and showing care versus being a dictator. Consequently, with reference to Bai and Morris (2014) and Chen and Lee (2008b), I argue that value exists in further exploring the extent to which the dialectical principles of Daoism influence the perception of leadership and leadership development among Chinese and Western employees in global companies.

A third group of scholars (e.g., Hwang, 2008; Ma & Tsui, 2015) have proposed that the philosophy of Legalism has had critical implications on the manner in which Chinese people conceptualise leadership today. In contrast to Confucianism, the philosophy of Legalism generally dictates that everyone must receive equal punishment for breaking laws, no matter their relationship with the leader (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Fundamentally, Legalism is based on an axiom that coincides with the following modern economic assumption: every individual has selfish and rational desires and agendas (Rindova & Starbuck, 1997). As with Confucianism and Daoism, the role that legalism plays in developing leaders in China is unclear. After reviewing the literature on Chinese leadership philosophies, it was evident to me that leadership conceptualisations in several areas such as self-transformation, holistic and dialectic perceptions, and leadership agency, have been indicated to be complex issues and differed significantly between China and the West. However, exactly where the differences in conceptualisations are embedded remains to be explored.

Third, this chapter outlined the literature on leadership development in the West and in China. Whilst contemporary global organisations increasingly prioritise investments in developing leadership capabilities among their employees (Schwartz et al., 2014; Kellerman, 2012), Day and Dragoni (2015) stated that the research on this topic is still

in its early stage of scientific development. The phenomenon of leadership development is complex and has implications at the individual, dyadic, team, and organisational levels of analysis, as well as longitudinally (Day et al., 2014). The approaches to its study have varied widely, and thus a need for greater conceptual clarity was suggested. When reviewing the research on leadership development, the distinction between 'leader development' and 'leadership development' is arguably important (Ibid.).

Research on leader development has generally focused on self-efficacy, self-awareness, and leader identity (Drath et al., 2008; Kotter, 2001). Whilst such research can be useful for organisations' professional practice, these studies have not addressed the core issue of whether the three focus areas have occurred as a function of leader development interventions. Consequently, Reilly et al. (2014) called for more research on how these elements are adopted in the initiatives that companies utilise when developing leaders, and with what results among its participants. Day and Dragoni (2015) further argued that such conceptual clarity would help the limits of generalisability and enable more mindful scientific progression. For instance, they argued that the leader development of first-line organisational leaders is likely to qualitatively differ from more experienced leaders and executives.

In this chapter, leadership development has been reviewed conceptually as relationship-based or a process of organising and mobilising effort for team or organisational adaptation (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Broadly speaking, this view on leadership development relates to an outcome of a social structure seeking to gain insights into the conditions that enable leadership processes to emerge, and expand overall collective efficacy (Ancona, Backman, & Isaacs, 2015). DeRue and Ashford (2010) suggested that conceptual clarity should be gained by articulating the context in which leadership development is studied. Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) supported this statement and urged future research to address the more important concern of the dynamics underlying developmental movement, such as culture and context in groups, teams, and across organisations. Thus, it is vital to examine how companies cross-culturally create processes, norms, and/or structures that fuel mutual influence among actors that can ultimately enhance direction setting, alignment, mindsets, and commitment in shared work (Day & Dragoni, 2015). This dissertation aims to contribute by achieving conceptual clarity through exploring how leadership development initiatives are designed and conducted in the collaboration between Western headquarters and Chinese

organisations of global companies. Finally, to identify gaps in the literature regarding leadership development in China, this chapter reviewed the development of leadership and management education in China, including an overview of its influences and inspiration from the West.

I particularly argued that the Chinese government and companies have expressed a fast-growing interest in Western management and leadership education (Goodall & Warner, 2010). Scholars in the field (e.g., Child & Derong, 2010; Shaw, 2005) have indicated that leadership development initiatives in Chinese companies were generally based on institutional MBA practices and corporate training and development programmes offered by multinational companies. It was a central point that both of these educational schemes were inspired by Western practices but with 'Chinese characteristics' (Goodall et al., 2004). When exploring why the success of cross-cultural leadership development initiatives has consistently proven difficult to achieve in a Chinese context, it is crucial to examine which approaches the companies in question have adopted as well as how they were perceived among participants in China.

2.5.2 Research Questions

A considerable number of scholars have addressed the nature of leadership and leadership development initiatives from a Western perspective (e.g., Day & Dragoni, 2015; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). Since the reform of 1979, Chinese government officials and academics have increasingly implemented Western educational schemes with 'Chinese characteristics' (Goodall et al., 2004). However, little is known about the extent to which inspiration from the West has influenced Chinese employees' conceptualisations of leadership and leadership development. Moreover, in remains to be uncovered how Western companies have responded to the challenge of implementing leadership development initiatives in a Chinese context including how these practices have affected their conceptions of leadership and leadership development. Finally, it must be researched how these approaches to leadership development have been perceived by the Chinese participants. The answer to such questions could ultimately play a crucial role in revealing why several foreign-based multinational companies have consistently faced significant challenges when developing leaders in a Chinese context (Gao, Arnulf, & Henning, 2011).

To elucidate these issues, I proposed the following three research questions for this dissertation:

1. How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development?
2. What views on leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development do foreign companies adopt when training leaders in China?
3. To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?

In the following chapter, the methodological rationale for pursuing these research questions is presented.

CHAPTER 3 – Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that informed this research project, which is done through presenting the following information:

1. Selected epistemological points of view and selection of research position.
2. Methodological consequences of the phenomenographic epistemological point of view guiding the research project.
3. The research design and overview, including a description of the qualitative interview method utilised and the type of knowledge this method produces. This is followed up by a description of how the interview schedule was designed and constructed.
4. The process of gaining access to companies and the selection of participants for the data collection.
5. The process of data analysis, including considerations of how to achieve validity and reliability within the research process.
6. The ethical implications and issues related to the study considered in the context of working with high-potential adult employees in global companies.

3.2 Epistemology and Selecting the Research Position

In the field of psychology and education, questions have traditionally been asked regarding why, for example, some individuals succeed more than others in a given learning context (Tight, 2016). Any answer to such questions is a statement of reality. In 1981, Säljö proposed asking an alternative question of *what people thought* about why some individuals succeed more at learning in a given context. Säljö (1981) thus changed the research focus from generating answers about reality to answers about people's conceptions of reality. These two manners of formulating questions represent two different perspectives; in the initial 'first-order perspective', which is by far the most

frequently adopted, the researcher orients him/herself towards the world and makes statements about it. By contrast, in the 'second-order perspective', the researcher orients towards people's ideas about the world (Marton, 1981; Tight, 2016).

According to Marton (1981, 1986), there are two related reasons for asking questions of the second-order variety. First, to explore the differences in how people interpret, perceive, and conceptualise various aspects of reality is interesting in and of itself, not least with regard to the pedagogical potential. Second, the descriptions derived from the second-order perspective are autonomous in the sense that they cannot be derived from descriptions arrived at from the first-order perspective. For example, the answer to how Chinese managers conceptualise effective leadership cannot be derived either from what we know (or will know in the future) about the general properties of the human mind, or about corporations, or even from the combination of what we know about both.

Marton (1981, 1986) designed and developed the research approach of 'phenomenography' to answer second-order questions about thinking and learning. The term 'phenomenography' resembles the rich and diverse tradition of phenomenology (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). As a philosophical movement, phenomenology was founded in the early years of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl, and has often, put very simply, been described as the study of structures of experiences and consciousness (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl's (1963) concern with the systematic reflection on and of the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness thus formed the cornerstone of phenomenography. However, the concepts of phenomenology and phenomenography have several differences. Whilst it is not within the scope of this study to outline all of these differences, a few central ones can be identified. First, from a strictly phenomenological perspective, the distinction between the first- and second-order perspectives is simply not feasible. According to the classical phenomenological line of thought (e.g., Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1963), we only have access to the world through experience, which implies that we cannot separate that which is experienced from the experience per se. For example, through investigating people's experience of leadership development, a phenomenologist would aim to describe the essence and commonality in how the phenomenon of leadership development is, whereas phenomenography would aim to learn about people's experience of leadership development (Bowden, 2000; Marton, 1981). Second, phenomenology is fundamentally

methodological, whereas phenomenography is not a research method but rather a set of assumptions about humans, science, and how knowledge of other people's ways of experiencing the world is acquired. The *phenomenology* of leadership development would refer to something that we arrive at concerning leadership development by means of a phenomenological investigation (Marton, 1981; Svensson, 1997). By contrast, the *phenomenography* of leadership development would refer to anything that can be said about how people perceive, experience, and conceptualise leadership development (Andersson & Kärrqvist, 1981; Johansson, Marton, & Svensson, 1985)[7].

However, phenomenography is not only concerned with phenomena, experiences, or with humans experiencing or thinking about those phenomena; it is also concerned with the relationship between humans and the world around them (Marton, 1986; Svensson, 1997). As opposed to more traditional psychology, which according to Marton (1986) has a tendency to study how people perceive and conceptualise the world and then apply this to content domains, phenomenography is more interested in the content of thinking. Thus, it is less about defining overarching laws of thought and perception that can be applied no matter the situation and subject matter, but more about describing thinking in terms of what is perceived and thought about. In this light, research is never separated from the object of perception or the content of thought (Marton, 1981, 1986). The objective of the method is to describe the qualitative differences in conceptual categories, and it has been used in various educational research contexts for mapping how people from various populations conceptualise and perceive phenomena in the world around them (Säljö, 1988; Vermunt, 1996). Marton (1986) argued that the mapping of hidden world human conceptions is a specialization in and of itself, and is complementary to other disciplines. A careful awareness of the different ways people think about a phenomenon may, according to Marton (1986), 'help uncover conditions that facilitate the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively "better" perception of reality' (Marton, 1986, p. 33). Marton (1986) further stressed that such a phenomenographic methodology is particularly beneficial and of special interest to those studying the psychology of learning.

The present study favours a phenomenographic second-order perspective to accommodate its goals for the following three reasons:

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[7] For more distinctions between phenomenology and phenomenography see Marton (1981).

- Little is known about how Chinese managers in Western companies interpret, appraise, and use the concepts of leadership and leadership development, dependent on their mental models. It is often supposed that didactic measures embedded in leadership development programmes (e.g., individual development plans, 360 degree feedback, and coaching) are desirable devices for leadership development (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Gao et al., 2011). However, how this influence is mediated by employees' mental models and actually impacts their conceptualisation of leadership and their leadership practice remains unclear (Ibid.).

- What have also remained unclear up to this point are the interrelationships for leadership development between Chinese employees and Western headquarters. These interrelationships are referred to here in terms of the conceptualisations of effective 'leadership' and 'leadership development'. As with the study of Vermunt (1996)[8], the concepts of effective 'leadership' and 'leadership development' are not conceived of as an unchangeable personality attribute in a fixed mindset but rather as the result of a temporal interplay between personal and contextual influences.

- From the literature presented in Chapter 2, it is clear that the choice of leadership development strategy plays a central role in the theory of cross-cultural leadership development. However, these theories are mostly grounded in American contexts and little is known about the manner in which employees in China perceive these strategies, as well as how the approaches of companies in various industries differ (e.g., Tse, 2010; Useem, Singh, Liang, & Cappelli, 2017). Moreover, data are sparse regarding how leadership development practices are regulated by internal and external sources when applied cross-culturally in China. It is an assumption of this study that insights into these

[8] Vermunt (1996) analyses student learning at universities, and not work place learning. Whilst the content of the learning process thus differ, the studies are similar in the sense that they both explore the way in which informants' conceptualisations and learning functions. Consequently, this study is inspired by Vermunt's (1996) epistemological research stance.

processes can make a valuable contribution to the educational practice of cross-cultural leadership development in China. In line with the foregoing arguments, exploring the learning and thinking of employees should be taken as a starting point in designing leadership development programmes.

In summary, phenomenography is more than simply a method of gathering and analysing data: it is integral to the overall work. Consequently, consideration of quality in phenomenographic research must begin at the outset of the study, when determining the research questions and justifying the appropriateness of the phenomenographic method. Phenomenography was developed in response to educational questions, and the knowledge generated by this methodological framework thus has direct educational relevance (Tight, 2016). In a narrower sense, the object of this study is Chinese managers' and Western headquarters' conceptions, and the phenomena of interest are leadership and leadership development. Leadership and leadership development are complex social phenomena characterised by the various fields of specialisation and carried out in rapidly changing business environments (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009; Zhu, 2017). From Western companies, there have been requests to develop Chinese senior leaders able to meet requirements and cope with the complexities of work (Kedl et al., 2012; Gao et al., 2011). The purpose of this study is to inform Western leadership development in China by exploring the current practices of five companies.

3.3 Methodological Consequences of a Phenomenographic Approach

This section highlights four methodological consequences associated with the aforementioned phenomenographic epistemological point of view: (1) the analysis procedure leading to 'categories of descriptions'; (2) how these categories emerge; (3) limitations and pitfalls; and (4) justifying the phenomenographic method.

3.3.1 ‘Categories of Descriptions’

The study of phenomenography has been described as the awareness of experiencing a particular phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). Findings are organised analytically as several qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon (referred to as ‘categories of descriptions’). Furthermore, this methodology examines the structural relationships that link the different ways of experiencing, thereby elucidating the relationships between these ways of experiencing the given phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2012). As described above, it is a fundamental epistemological assumption underlying the approach that structural relationships exist between ways of experiencing (Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Thus, the different ways of experiencing are expected to be logically related through the common phenomenon being experienced (Åkerlind, 2012). Marton and Booth described this as follows: ‘There is not a real world “out there” and a subjective world “in here”. The world [as experienced] is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them’ (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13). As a methodological consequence, the researcher aims to identify a logically inclusive structure relating the different meanings. The categories of description constituted by the researcher provide a holistic way of looking at collective human experience of phenomena, despite the fact that the same phenomenon might be perceived differently by different people (Åkerlind, 2012). An ideal aim of phenomenographic analysis is to represent the full range of possible ways of experiencing a given phenomenon, at a particular point in time, and for the population represented by the sample group collectively (Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005).

Åkerlind (2012) emphasised that phenomenographic research aims to investigate a number of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group. For the present study, this means that no interview transcript can be interpreted in isolation from the others. Instead, every transcript is understood within the context of the group of transcripts or meanings as a whole in terms of similarities and differences (Åkerlind et al., 2005). Marton and Booth (1997) emphasised the following three main criteria for evaluating the quality of a phenomenographic analysis:

1. Each outcome category reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding the phenomenon.
2. The categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships.
3. The outcomes are parsimonious; i.e., the critical variations in experience observed in the data are represented using a set of as few categories as possible.

As Åkerlind (2012) described, the set of categories or meanings that derive from the analysis are not determined in advance but 'emerge' from the data in relation to the researcher. The following subsection outlines the methodological requirements for the analytic process of 'emergence' in the present study.

3.3.2 'Emergence' of Categories

In phenomenographic analysis, it is of paramount importance to attempt, as far as possible, to maintain an open mind, minimising any predetermined views about the nature of the categories of description (Åkerlind, 2012). Thus, the researcher must constantly adjust his or her thinking and reflection of new perspectives. To maintain a focus on collective experience, it is vital to maintain focus on transcripts and emerging categories as a set (Ibid.). Therefore, reading individual transcripts and defining individual categories must occur within the context of identifying similarities and differences among transcripts and relationships between categories as a group (Åkerlind, 2008).

Phenomenographic analysis begins with a search for meaning, or variations in meaning, across interview transcripts, and is subsequently supplemented by a search for structural relationships between meanings (Bowden, 2005). The initial stages are consequently characterised by reading through transcripts with a high degree of openness to possible meanings, and throughout the readings subsequently tightening the focus on particular aspects or criteria, but still within a framework of openness to new interpretations (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bowden, 2005).

An essential feature of the constitution of categories of description is the search for key qualitative similarities within and differences between the categories (Åkerlind, 2012). In practice, selected quotes from the transcripts are grouped and regrouped according to perceived similarities among various criteria. Marton (1986) described this process as follows: '… categories are tested against the data, adjusted, retested, and adjusted again. There is, however, a decreasing rate of change and eventually the whole system of meanings is stabilized' (Marton, 1986, p. 42).

The phenomenographic analysis conducted by this study is described in more detail in Section 3.7. However, first, the construction of the interview schedule is outlined.

3.3.3 Limitations and Pitfalls

Phenomenography originated as a descriptive approach to studying people's conceptions of aspects of the phenomena around us. Whilst phenomenography, with its 40-year history, has gained much popularity in educational research, the fundamental conceptual underpinnings of this approach has come under scrutiny (Sin, 2010).

First, phenomenographic studies have been questioned in terms of their validity. This criticism concerned accessing people's conceptions. Mishler (1991) comments that a lack of a non-contextual or transparent relationship between representation and reality in interviews, and the inherent difference between language and meaning in interview data in general, is problematic. Säljö (1996, 1997) specifically critiques phenomenographic studies and questions the assumption of congruence between quotations in oral discourse (interview data) and conceptions (object of study), where quotations are analysed and later reported as conceptions (findings). Säljö (1996, 1997) further argues that phenomenographic studies have failed to identify a valid link between these elements and is moreover critical of the practice of interpreting linguistic differences and word choice by interviewees as representative of differences in conceptual content.

Aspects of accessing people's conceptions are addressed comprehensively by Svensson, Anderberg, and Alvegard (2006) and Johansson, Svensson, Anderberg, and Alvegard (2006). These studies focus on the reciprocal relationships, or interplay, between conception, meaning, and oral expression. These authors found that, in this system of

interplay, the conceptual meaning of an expression is constituted by the conception and the expression. Thus, a choice of words to express a conceptual meaning is intentional. In phenomenographic analysis, the researcher searches for conceptual meanings in the data. Johnson (2006) emphasises that the process of exploring internal relationships from the perspective of the individual's own understanding is fundamental to identifying meaning. However, the interplay is a complex and implicit relationship; and during conversation, the conceptual meaning of an expression can be elucidated by encouraging the speaker to reflect on the intended meaning of his or her intended meaning (Sin, 2010).

In this study, interviewees were provided with the opportunity to clarify their meanings, asked follow-up questions, and given the time and space to reflect. Moreover, I listened attentively and avoided asking leading questions. This is what Nussbaum (1986) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have referred to as 'the wise perceiving agent', which will be further described later in this chapter.

Second, phenomenographic studies have been criticised for the way in which the subjectivity of the researcher may intrude on the interpretive process (Sin, 2010). Consequently, Morse (2006) argues that some forms of reliability checking are necessary. Following Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty (1997), such checks are not carried out for the purpose of re-producing prior findings, but to revisit a topic or a phenomenon after an interval to make a fresh appraisal. Marton (1986) and Säljö (1988) argue that the outcome space in phenomenographic studies is a form of discovery, arising from a rigorous process of transcript-reading iterations, analysis, and validation of the data and such discoveries do not have to be replicable, as such. Thus, in line with Morse et al. (2002), interpretive awareness becomes a question of focussing more on the research process than the outcome.

In this study, I have attempted to account for the fact that I, as the researcher, am not independent of the phenomenon under study by documenting and explaining how I have practiced interpretive awareness, enabling the reader to make a judgement about the research process and the reliability of the findings (Malterud, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, in the establishment of categories, I have utilised inter-rater reliability checks (Chi, 1997). Thus, this dissertation benefits from the arguments and insights of previous researchers concerning methodological issues and their resolutions. This study

has integrated practical ways of addressing these issues at each stage of the phenomenographic research process, which is further described later in the paper (Sin, 2010).

3.3.4 Justifying the Phenomenographic Method

Spencer et al. (2003) state that an internally consistent research method ensures that the research design is defensible. This study justifies the phenomenographic method by, first, establishing the consistency between the object of the study and phenomenography by referring to the Svensson (1997) definition of phenomenography as a research orientation that studies lived experiences and conceptions. I then underscore the suitability of the method by referring to Säljö (1996), who emphasises its appropriateness for studying complex social phenomena. Finally, taking the view of Sin (2010), I note the consistency between the relational assumption of conceptions and the epistemological approach of phenomenography, where I, as a researcher, engage with participants to explore their experiences.

The suitability of the method is further reinforced by its ability to satisfy the stated purpose of the study. Phenomenography elucidates the variations of participants' conceptions of a phenomenon of interest (Sin, 2010). The descriptive findings of this phenomenographic study provide insights into how employees understand their work and the nature and scope of their understanding. This study links the descriptive form of phenomenographic findings and the experiences of leadership and leadership development by explaining that less developed conceptions can be used as target learning outcomes in the curriculum for future practice.

3.4 Overview of the Research Design

This section outlines an overview of the key processes involved in preparing for knowledge generation in this study. First, the advantages and disadvantages of employing a qualitative research approach are highlighted. Subsequently, the utilised data generation method is presented, which is through qualitative semi-structured interviews. Moreover, this section emphasises the considerations related to constructing

the interview schedule, which include thematising, designing, interviewing participants, transcribing data, and piloting the interview schedule.

3.4.1 Interviews as a Data Generation Tool

As described in Chapter 2, scholars have urged future research to explore the conceptual clarity around leadership and leadership development in different cultural settings. To explore the qualitative differences in conceptual categories regarding leadership and leadership development among participants from a phenomenographic research stance, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the method of data collection. This choice is in agreement with Rasmussen et al. (2007), who proposed that qualitative studies are particularly well suited for explorative in-depth purposes, reflecting the participants' subjective perceptions of the researcher's more open-ended question categories. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) agreed and went on to describe the qualitative interview as a knowledge-producing activity that can elucidate our conversational reality and provide us with compelling descriptions of the human world. Consequently, I decided to utilise semi-structured interviews because of the explorative nature of the research questions, and with the aim of outbalancing the lack of qualitative data in the academic field.

In the following paragraphs, I address how the knowledge generated from semi-structured interviews may be characterised. This will serve as a helpful guideline later in the analysis and discussion to understand the possibilities for and limitations on the knowledge acquired in the study. Kvale (1997) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argued that particularly the three philosophies of hermeneutics, pragmatism, and positivism have played crucial roles when conceptualising the knowledge provided from qualitative interviews in the post-modern age. This study situates itself with reference to all three philosophies, despite their fundamental differences.

Hermeneutics has often been described (e.g., Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1971) as the interpretation of texts with the underlying purpose of obtaining a valid and common understanding. With a starting point in Plato's dialogues, Gadamer (1975) argued that both conversations and oral traditions are presuppositions for understanding written texts. According to Gadamer (1975), humans are conversational beings for whom language is a reality. Ricoeur (1971) extended these hermeneutic principles to the

interpretation of meaningful action. According to Ricoeur (1971), human beings are self-interpreting, historical creatures, whose means of understanding depend on certain prejudices originating from tradition and historical life. Every text derives its meaning from a context. Consequently, knowledge of other people's actions always depends 'upon some background or context of other meanings, beliefs, values, practices, and so forth' (Schwandt, 2000, p. 201). In the present study, the hermeneutical philosophy is drawn upon when analysing interview data as texts and searching beyond the present interview situation; for example, by paying attention to the contextual interpretive horizon provided by history and tradition (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Palmer, 1969).

Pragmatists (e.g., Dewey, 1984; James, 1890; Peirce, 1992) developed their philosophy in the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More recently, from a neopragmatic position, Rorty (1979) argued that knowledge is acquired through conversation and social practice rather than a mirroring of nature. Therefore, it is not the epistemological stance that should decide the method but the nature of the research question. In doing so, a superior understanding of a social phenomenon is ultimately attained. Research methodologies are thus understood and interpreted as tools to help researchers understand the world in which they live (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Consequently, this study focuses on practical aspects of its research areas as well as on the issues of values and ethics raised by the use-value of its research.

Positivists (e.g., Schwandt, 2001; Watson, 1913) have often been sceptical of qualitative research. From the mid-twentieth century, a rigorous neopositivist epistemology came to dominate the social sciences, in which scientific facts were to be unambiguous, objective, quantifiable, and based upon observable data. Furthermore, influence of the subjectivity of the researcher was to be minimised. Because interview data consist of meaningful statements based on interpretations, they becomes unscientific from a methodical positivism approach, thereby relegating qualitative research to an inferior position (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, it should be kept in mind that although social scientists have often labelled positivist research as uncritical, positivists have in fact contributed to moving social research beyond myth and common sense. Their emphasis on using transparent and systematic methods for arriving at scientific data opens the possibility of intersubjective ideological bias in research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). With inspiration from the philosophy behind positivist research frameworks, the present study attempts to conduct such a systematic and transparent approach by

utilising frameworks for securing validity and reliability. These approaches will be further described in the following subsections.

3.4.2 Thematising the Interview Schedule

The interviews were thematised with reference to existing empirical research on leadership and leadership development in the field. By indicating gaps in the academic literature, a theme and research design was systematically developed. As described in Chapter 2, this resulted in three major research questions:

(1) How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development?

(2) What views of leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development do foreign companies adopt when training leaders in China?

(3) To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?

Prior to the design of the interview guide, an MPhil dissertation (Petersen, 2014), serving as a pilot study, and introduction meetings with the respective enterprises were conducted. This process resulted in the creation of two 16-question interview guides, one for Chinese high-potential employees/managers and one for the Western interviewees representing the companies' headquarters. Whilst a few questions were phrased slightly differently to the high-potential employees and headquarters, all questions generally addressed four topics: (1) reflections on the interviewee's professional practice (background, current responsibilities, and ambitions/future plans); (2) conceptions of leadership; (3) conceptions of leadership development; and (4) evaluations of successful/unsuccessful leadership development (see Interview Schedule in 'Appendix 'B1' and 'B2').

3.4.3 Designing Interview Schedule

The interviews were designed and conducted as explorative individual semi-structured interviews. This method allowed the opportunity for the researcher to learn and influence the process in collaboration with the participants during the actual investigation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Due to the complexity of the topic, and the lack of existing empirical data in the field, this was considered a valuable feature. Meanwhile, throughout the entire interview process, the end point of the investigation was kept in mind; to collect data uncovering the three major research topics stated above.

The interviewees consisted of relevant high-potential employees either participating in the leadership development initiatives or responsible for designing and implementing the companies' leadership development strategy in China.

In phenomenography, researchers categorise different conceptions of a phenomenon. The categorisation process entails an abstraction of data in terms of their similarities and differences (Åkerlind, 2012; Marton, 1986). Marton and Booth (1997) suggest maximising the conceptual variations to ensure adequate data to derive an optimal set of categories. In large datasets, however, Sin (2010) argues that this approach can lead to superficial analyses or data management problems, which may prevent extended application of the findings.

In this study, I consider two main factors in participant recruitment: the possibility of recruitment and the time and resources available to ensure adequate data for deriving an optimal set of categories. Based on previous experience (Petersen, 2014), five different companies was considered appropriate, each company with 1-2 business leaders/managers responsible for the leadership development practice. Additionally, I aimed for 4-6 managers participating in the programmes to obtain sufficient conceptual variations of participants without leading to a superficial analysis. Thus, the study aimed for a total of 25–40 interviewees. With reference to Kvale (2008), the timeframe of each interview was estimated at a maximum 60 minutes. This was considered suitable for obtaining sufficient recess as well as to possess a foreseeable nature for a project of this scope. A similar interview guide was used with all participants, making it easier to

analyse the data vertically in each individual enterprise as well as horizontally between the participating companies.

Whilst all interviews require a somewhat different structure, Qu and Dumay (2011) and Kvale (2008) proposed that certain principles and techniques should be present in a successful semi-structured qualitative interview. These guidelines are generally centred around (1) an opening, (2) a body, and (3) closing/reporting.

Kvale (2008) emphasised how the opening should provide a context for the interviewee. This includes indicating the objectives of the interview and making it clear what topic areas will be addressed. The intention is to establish rapport and make the participant feel welcome and relaxed to build trust and get the interviewee talking freely.

Furthermore, according to Kvale (2008), the body of the interview schedule should list the topics and questions to be covered. The number of questions and the exact wording of the questions depend on the type of interview schedule used. In this case, the interview schedule consisted of semi-structured interviews, wherein the main questions and probe questions were listed, allowing the interviewer to adapt to the interaction that unfolded (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Finally, the closing should maintain the tone set throughout the interview and be brief but not abrupt (Kvale, 2008). This includes the interviewer summarising the main issues discussed during the interview, discussing the next course of action to be taken, and thanking the respondent for his or her time. Appendix ‘B1’ and ‘B2’ include two interview schedules constructed according to these principles: one for the Chinese high-potential employees and one for the headquarter representatives.

3.4.4 Developing Additional Research Tools

3.4.4.1 Opinion Sheet

As described in Chapter 2, Dubrin (2000) estimated the existence of more than 35,000 definitions of leadership in the literature. A central point was that the term ‘leadership’ is often used in companies and academia without sufficiently explicating what is meant by the term (Bolden et al., 2011).

Consequently, a framework was developed capable of mapping the participants' conceptualisations of effective leadership. Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, each leadership paradigm was condensed into a set of brief quotations, which resulted in six statements regarding how effective leadership might be conceptualised. The statements reflected the following research paradigms: (1) individual leadership; (2) contextual leadership; (3) new leadership; (4) collective leadership; (5) Followers; and (6) post-modern leadership. The statements are described in Appendix 'B3'.

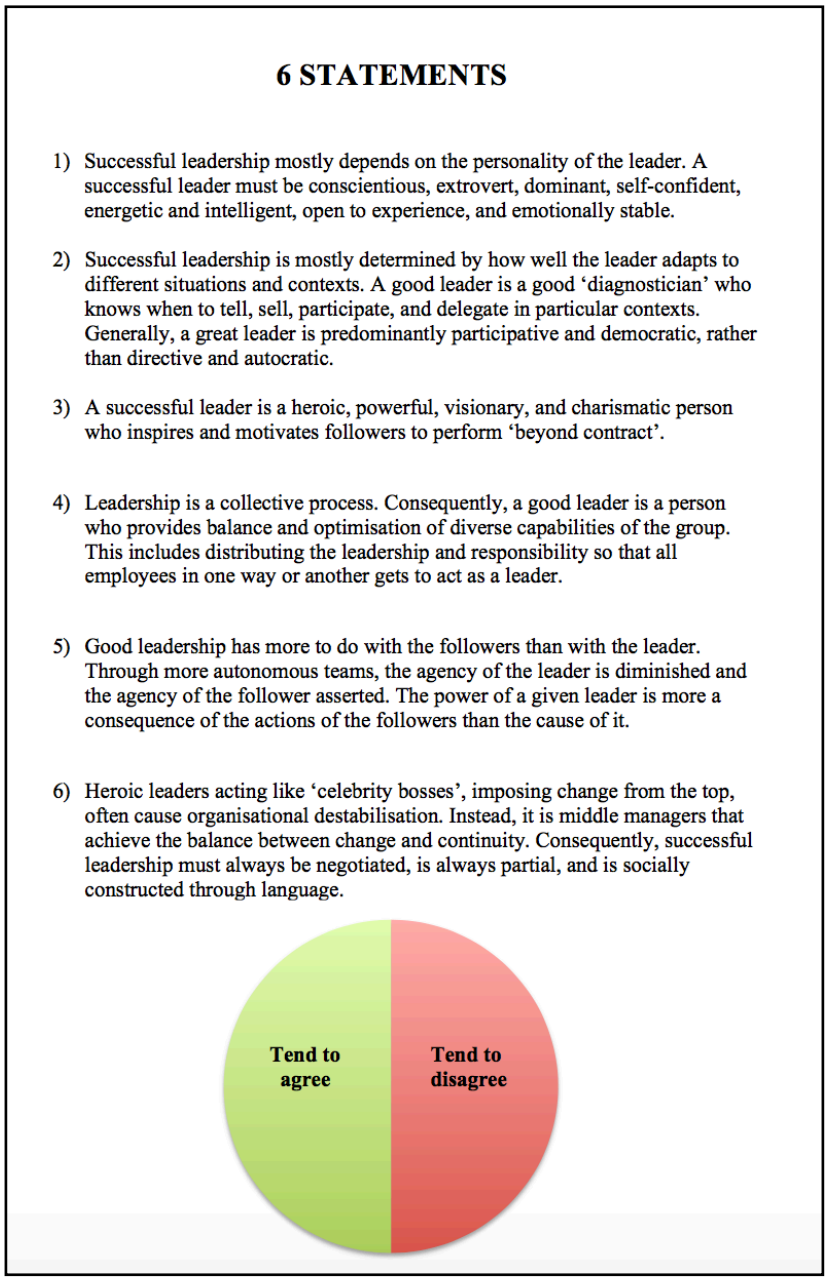

Figure 3.1: Opinion Sheet

During the interviews, each participant was systematically asked whether she or he tended to agree or disagree with each statement and why. The point had less to do with ticking boxes and more to do with creating a platform for understanding the participants' logic, ideas, mental models, and perceptions around all the facets of leadership. This approach was in line with what Heineman (1953) defined as a 'forced-choice' methodology. Heineman (1953)found that this methodology drastically reduced the possible tendencies of participants to consider the social desirability of particular responses, and thus, it decreased the level of anxiety among interviewees because of the reduction of complexity of possible answers.

3.4.4.2 Ranking of Statements

Following the opinion sheet, the participants were presented with the same statements, but this time they were cut into slips and the interviewees were asked to rank the statements from 1 to 6 (more to less important). This method was utilised to make the participants prioritise the thoughts they expressed in the conversations for the opinion sheet (see Figure 3.2). The underlying idea was to explore any potential trends among employees and headquarters in the different companies and investigate matches and mismatches in their perceptions.

The statements on the slips were in English and Chinese. Despite relatively few sentences, the translation process took a long time because my Chinese writing abilities are limited. Every time a personal native-speaking contact of mine translated the statements into Chinese, another Chinese friend or colleague was kind enough to perform a back translation into English. Four rounds of translation were conducted before the sentences were translated well enough. A full version of the 'Ranking Statements' sheet can be found in Appendix 'B3'.

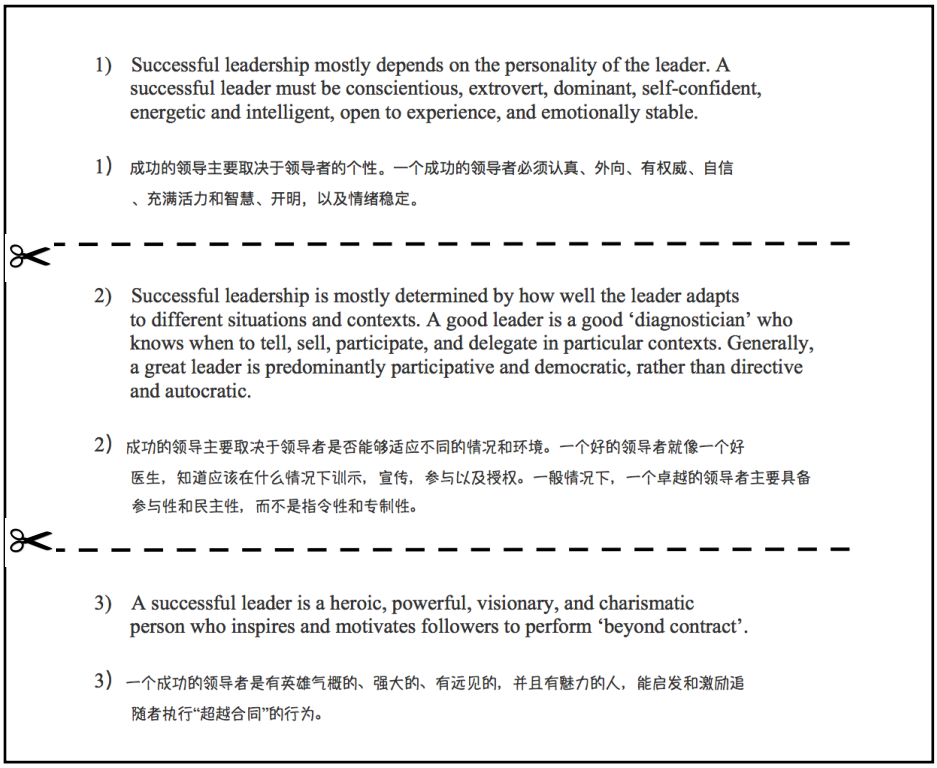

Figure 3.2: Example of 'Ranking of Statements'

3.4.5 Interviewing

The 16 interview questions were brief, simple, and mostly open-ended. Questions 1 to 3 were opening questions, serving the indirect purpose of establishing a positive relationship with the informant as well as learning about the participant's professional career (job function, background, and future ambitions). The remaining questions were grouped into four themes, designed so that first questions related to specific experiences were asked, and gradually developing towards those of a more abstract nature. In this way, the beginning of the interview focused on aspects already familiar to the participant with the aim of creating a safe atmosphere.

Hodgson (1987) emphasised the importance of drawing information together for the interviewee in the form of a summary of the essential information covered in the interview. Such a 'closing' was undertaken at the end of each interview and, when considered appropriate, at the end of each topic. In this manner, feedback concerning the interviewees' understanding was obtained.

Anderberg (2000) presents the 'intentional-expressive approach' as a systematic strategy for elucidating and confirming the conceptual meanings in interviewees' expressions. In the intentional-expressive approach, interviewees are first asked questions regarding the phenomenon of interest. Follow-up questions are then asked to encourage interviewees to reflect on the conceptual meanings they have expressed.

The intentional-expressive approach to phenomenographic interviews encourages participants to reflect on and confirm the intended meanings of their expressions. Svensson et al. (2006) state that data obtained by the intentional-expressive approach through phenomenographic interviews are objective, as the meanings therein are from the interviewees' perspectives and constituted by their own understanding of the phenomenon of interest. The following is an example of a follow-up question from this study:

> *Interviewee*: A leader needs to make sure that the followers do what they are told and follow the ideas. He or she must be inspirational.
> *Interviewer*: 'Inspirational', what does that mean?

Thus, the phenomenon of interest is explored jointly between the interviewer and the interviewee (Marton, 1994). Sin (2010) highlights that this process necessitates engagement and interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, whereas the influence of the interviewer can be deemed a weakness of the method. Sin (2010), however, states the necessity of recognising and preserving the characteristic of joint exploration.

Millar, Crute, and Hargie (1992) argued that in an interview process, it is not possible to attend to all available cues, and hence, attention is always selective. During the interviews, I tried to focus mainly on the answers to the questions as opposed to following the interview schedule rigidly. On the spot, I continuously evaluated in which direction I wanted to take the interview. During Phase I and Phase II, I took notes for my own purposes but not for remembering afterwards. This choice is in alignment with the semi-structured explorative nature of the study (Millar et al., 1992). In Phase III, I took notes to remember information because the participants were not feeling comfortable with being recorded, which was because their companies were not formally engaging as interview partners in the study.

In advance, a number of 'tricker questions' were constructed. A tricker is a question with similar content to a recent question, only formulated slightly differently (Kvale, 2008). I chose to include these to increase the chance of participants expressing thoughts on each of the five areas. The type and numbers of trickers varied from interview to interview, but served the fundamental purpose of creating understanding. This was, for instance, in cases where I did not express myself clearly on certain areas, if longer periods of silence occurred, or if an answer seemed to be misinterpreted or understood differently (e.g., due to cultural differences). Moreover, a number of reflexive trickers were used to, for example, contrast the positive and negative experiences of leadership development. This was to ensure the participant reflected on both the pros and cons of the educational practices. Finally, probing questions were used to make an interviewee expand upon his or her initial responses (e.g., a feeling or an idea). Such questions included: 'Can you tell me more about (…)?' (Millar et al., 1992).

3.4.6 Transcribing

A transcription is a translation from oral into written language. Because of the uncertainty and complexity associated with this process, the hermeneutical tradition has often claimed that 'translators are traitors' (e.g., Gadamer, 2011; Ricoeur, 2006). In particular, irony is notoriously difficult to represent in a transcript. For example, Bourdieu stated that irony as well as other common yet important tropes are almost certainly 'lost in transcription' (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 622 note 15). The transcription of the audio recording lacks body language, intonation, tone of the voice, and breathing. I thus argue that transcribing in and of itself becomes an initial analytical process.

To learn as much as possible from my own interview style and to ensure the transcription procedure was similar in all interviews, I transcribed all of the of data myself. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argued that pauses, overlaps, intonation of speech interactions, noting of noises such as 'mh', and frequent repetitions, are neither feasible nor necessary for the meaning analysis of large interview texts in common interview projects, in cases where the focus of the interview is not on the linguistic style and social interaction. Consequently, I chose to extract and transcribe the central meaning of the interviews and only include these features in situations where it seemed particularly important to the meaning of the interview. Finally, the identities of the interviewed

subjects, as well as events and persons in the interviews that might be easily recognised, were masked in the quotations. This was done to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the subjects and institutions participating in the interviews. For the same reason, the raw data are not attached. In total, 1,165 pages of raw data were transcribed[9].

Phenomenographic analysis focuses on the intended conceptual meanings of the interviewees in their expressions. Barnacle (2005) raises the concern that some aspects potentially cannot be expressed. Consequently, relying solely on transcripts for phenomenographic analysis poses a risk of misinterpretation. In this study, I recognise this limitation of transcription and take two specific steps to address it. First, I mitigated the threat of losing touch with the original interview context by reflecting on the interview shortly afterwards and making mental and written notes of relevant contextual features. Second, as recommended by Sin (2010), I listened to the recordings several times, both before and after transcription.

3.4.7 Piloting

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) defined the term 'pilot study', also called a 'feasibility' study, as a mini version of a full-scale study. They further argued that this tool provides the researcher with the possibility for pretesting a particular instrument, such as an interview schedule or survey. As such, a pilot study can generate valuable insights for the researcher before data collection is initiated. For this dissertation, a pilot study of the interview schedule was conducted for the following reasons:

- To develop and test the adequacy of the research instruments.
- To assess the feasibility of the interview schedule.
- To assess whether the interview schedule was realistic and workable.
- To potentially further develop research instruments (Ibid).

The interview schedule was designed as an extension of my MPhil dissertation (Petersen, 2014), which explored the challenges regarding leadership development that

[9] One page corresponding to 228.6 words (University of Cambridge Word Limits, 2018).

Western companies encountered in China. As such, I had already gained experience in designing and conducted a similar interview schedule with 11 participants in similar professional positions. This process had equipped me with a general idea of the types and number of questions to ask.

Additionally, I reached out to a research colleague who had recently undertaken a comparable study to mine in the Psychology and Education group at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. In a calm environment, through a role-play, we practiced the interview schedule together. Although a few questions were deleted due to the time frame and some were slightly rephrased, these were generally minor alterations. The major point learned from the pilot study was a following discussion about leadership conceptualisations, which resulted in the creation of the opinion sheet and statement ranking research tools.

In a phenomenographic context, the pilot interviews were conducted to ensure that the phenomenon under study had been communicated clearly to the participants. Pilot interviews also helped to improve phenomenographic interview techniques (see Section 3.4.5) especially being a new researcher. The pilot interview, however, was not included in the data analysis.

3.4.8 Reporting

Whilst the categories of conceptions are second-order descriptions, as they are individuals' own conceptions of phenomena from their own perspectives (Marton, 1981), the researcher is not indifferent to the research process (Sin, 2010). Thus, the researcher's voice in reporting the findings is inevitable (Haraway, 1991; Malterud, 2001). In acknowledgement of this, I committed to the reflexivity and clearly describing each stage of the reporting and its underlying reasons.

In phenomenographic research, quotations from the interviews are typically used to support and clarify the meanings of the reported conceptions (Sin, 2010). In this study, I examined the texts surrounding the selected quotations to ensure that the intended meanings were conveyed in the selected quotations.

Finally, Sin (2010) emphasises that when reporting findings, the intended meanings may not be clear to readers. Especially for a new researcher, there is a danger of unreflected and unguarded language in verbal representations of the findings. As recommended by Anderberg (2000), I attempted to mitigate these issues by consciously reflecting on the use of terms and explaining the intended meanings in the discussion of the findings. Additionally, supervision by an experienced phenomenographer was invaluable for quality assurance.

3.5 Recruitment Process and Participant Selection

The recruitment of participants was initiated on October 1, 2015 and resulted in three visits, all very different in terms of recruitment strategies, purposes, and outcomes[10]. Whether it was due to the hectic and vibrant Chinese economy and company cultures, or just a rapid pace on the labour market in general, the study experienced various practical and logistic challenges in arranging meetings for interviews. Such experiences can be useful for other potential researchers replicating the study, and the three recruitment visits and challenges encountered will consequently be outlined in the following subsections. All names of participants and companies have been changed to ensure anonymity.

3.5.1 Phase I: Recruiting Employees at the Headquarters

The first step was to get in touch with employees working at the companies' headquarters. This choice of recruitment strategy was adopted based on the idea that the headquarter employees would have an overview of which 'high-potential employees' to include in Phase II of the study. The aim of the interviews in Phase I was to gain insight into the view on leadership and leadership development approaches that the companies adopted in their professional practice in China. Phase I participants had to meet the following five criteria to qualify for the study:

[10] In principle, networking processes already started in 2013 before the writing of my MPhil thesis (Petersen, 2014).

- They had to be involved in constructing leadership development initiatives for high-potential employees in the company;
- have a level of seniority to speak on behalf of company values, visions, and ambitions;
- have sufficient time and resources to help arrange and support the interview process. In some cases, two people from HR were identified: one with high seniority who could represent company values and visions, and one with lower seniority to help with practical matters;
- represent companies of five different industries for comparative reasons; and
- represent large global companies (Fortune 500 companies) with high brand value. This requirement was set to increase the chance that data were collected from relatively successful companies on the global scene, and thus ensuring that the study could contribute solid and useful data for other companies to learn from.

The interviewees were approached through my personal network, Cambridge University Alumni Services, and cold calls over the phone. Moreover, social media platforms such as LinkedIn and WeChat were used extensively in the search for people in the right positions. Although several people refused, most were willing to either help directly or put me in touch with a relevant person.

Visit I: Visit I began on February 1, 2016 and lasted until April 14, 2016. It started in Scandinavia with an interview with the Scandinavian headquarters of Logistics Co. The informant in question held a title similar to 'Head of Learning and Development'. The company is a global leader within the shipping industry and has often been associated with quality, stability, and professionalism. After an interview in the Scandinavian headquarters, the interviewee helped introduce me to the Chinese Chairman and his Personal Assistant who played an essential role in the planning of Visit II. Moreover, this interviewee helped introduce me to two of his former colleagues at Oil Co, China. Oil Co is among the world's largest companies measured by revenue. It is a globally strong player that is particularly known to be politically influential, innovative, and prestigious to work for. Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain interviews with employees based at the Western headquarters. However, because of the company's large size and a high level of autonomy in the Chinese organisation, it made sense to proceed with the Chinese organisation only (HR managers and selected high-potential

employees). Finally, informal Skype interviews were conducted with the American Vice President of Retail Co and the 'Head of Workforce Capability, APAC' of Bank Co in Singapore. Both contacts expressed willingness to help establish contact with relevant informants in their Chinese organisations. Retail Co and Bank Co are both known as world-leading players in each of their industries, and Retail Co in particular is reputed for its large number of employees.

3.5.2 Phase II: Recruiting High-Potential Employees

The second step was to reach out to the Chinese high-potential employees in the five companies. The aim was to gather data regarding the high-potential employees' perceptions of (1) how effective leadership was conceptualised; (2) how effective leadership development was conceptualised; and (3) which company strategies for leadership development were perceived as successful. The participants had to meet the following five criteria to qualify for the study:

- They had to be considered high-potential employees by the headquarters, as well as have already been exposed to leadership development initiatives to be able to share their experiences and perspectives;
- have a seniority level high enough to be able to share experiences of the transition to becoming a top leader in the company;
- have sufficient time and willingness to share their views on their professional practice;
- represent companies of five different industries for comparative reasons; and
- represent large global companies (Fortune 500 companies) with high brand value. This was chosen to increase the chance that data were collected from relatively successful companies on the global scene, and thus this study could contribute solid and useful data for other companies to learn from.

Visit II: Visit II began on April 15, 2016. It started in Hong Kong where I contacted relevant interviewees from Phase I to help setup interviews in China. After various attempts at getting in touch, interviews were arranged with Logistics Co and Oil Co.

Moreover, a planning meeting with Bank Co, with the 'Head of Workforce Capability, APAC', was arranged in Singapore. After the planning meeting in Singapore, I flew to Beijing where interviews were conducted with Oil Co (five high-potential employees and one headquarters responsible), Bank Co (three high-potential employees), and with Logistics Co (one headquarters responsible). From Beijing, the trip continued on to Shanghai. In Shanghai, interviews were conducted with Bank Co (three high-potential employees and one headquarters responsible), and Logistics Co (four high-potential employees). During my stay in Shanghai, contact was suddenly successfully established with the Vice President of Toy Co after several cold calls. This resulted in six interviews (two headquarters responsible and four high-potential employees). Finally, contact was established with the Chinese organisation of Retail Co. Consequently, I flew to Shenzhen where I conducted five interviews with Retail Co (one headquarters responsible and four high-potential employees). A general point learned from Phase II of the data collection was that it was considerably easier to conduct recruitment when physically based in China. The impression was that the remarkable lack of responses I experienced during Phase I reflected the 'need for acting fast' on operationalisable and clear agreements, which was possible in Phase II.

3.5.3 Phase III: Companies and Institutions Mentioned in Phases I and II

During Phases I and II, several interviewees mentioned other companies and university institutions they perceived to be front-runners in terms of leadership development in China. Thus, I decided to travel to China again to talk to as many of them as possible. In line with the phenomenographic method, this helped mitigating losing touch with the interview context and extended my understanding of contextual features from Phase I and II (Sin, 2010). The companies were approached though introductions from my personal network and cold calls. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and WeChat were used extensively to get in touch with the right people. These interviews were not formally used in the dataset but served to validate findings and ideas up until this stage. Moreover, these interviews helped to inform directions for further research.

Participants had to meet the following five criteria to qualify for interviews:

- The possibility had to exist that they could represent a company mentioned by an employee in Phase I or II;
- possess direct experience with the company's leadership development practice at the higher levels, either as HR personnel, company leaders, or employees;
- have sufficient time and willingness to share their views on their professional practice;
- had to represent a global company or a university institution with experience of leadership development in China; and
- be willing to share experiences with or without a tape recorder.

Visit III: Visit III began on January 1, 2017. Because the five official companies had already been chosen, the goal was to explore whether the companies in Phase III experienced similar challenges in China, as well as if they had any additional information to consider for this project and for future research. The companies were a global restaurant chain (Hong Kong), a global top technology company (Hong Kong), a clothes retail company (Hong Kong), and a globally established cosmetics company (China). The interviewees were one headquarters responsible and one high-potential employee from each company. The interviews were not recorded but extensive notes were taken. Finally, the Head of Executive Education at one of China's leading Business Schools was interviewed regarding experiences with developing Chinese business leaders.

To summarise the process of data collection and analysis, a Time and Activity Plan of the study is presented below. Subsequently, Table 3.1 presents an overview of the companies included in the study, and finally, Table 3.2 provides an overview of the interviewees recruited.

Time and Activity Plan

Project Ph.D. Project: Research Design
Prepared by Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen, University of Cambridge
Last Update 07/09/17

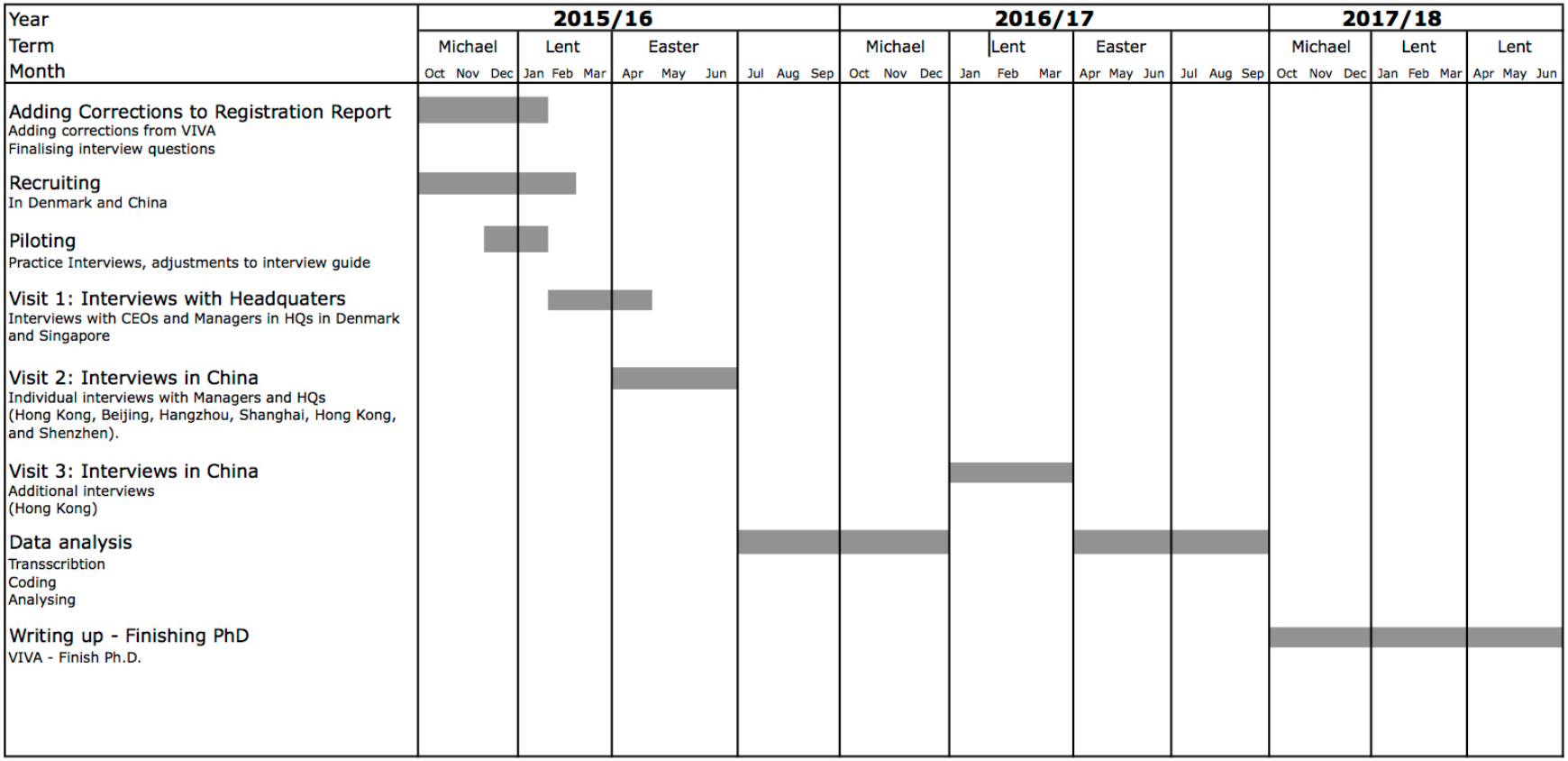

Figure 3.3: Time and activity plan

Table 3.1: Overview of the Companies Included

Company:	**Oil Co**	**Bank Co**	**Toy Co**	**Retail Co**	**Logistics Co**
Industry:	Oil & Gas	Banking/ Financial Services	Toys	Retail	Shipping & Logistics
Offices visited:	Beijing	Beijing, Shanghai, and Singapore	Shanghai	Shenzhen and Skype with US	Beijing, Shanghai, and Copenhagen
Number of Employees globally/in China	93,000+/ 20,000+	99,744+/ 2,000+	19,000+/ NA	1.5 million+/ 100,000+	88,000+/ 14,000+
Global Revenues:	US$ 233.6 billion (2016)	30.0 billion EUR (2016)	37.9 billion kr. (2016)	US$ 485.9 billion (2016)	US$ 35.5 billion (2016)
Reason for including:	Global company; impact; strong value brand; high global political influence; strong presence in China.	Global company; Central European Values; High global impact; High brand value (in the West); a pioneer in China.	Global company; Profitable brand value; creative industry; Scandinavian values; high growth in China; High focus on Education (e.g., gender equality, environment, and history).	Global company; Strong American corporate values and company culture; Prestigious and well-known brand; Strong presence in China for more than 50 years.	Global company; Strong Scandinavian values; Global political player; Culture associated with humility and hard work; High focus on Education; Strong presence in China.

Table 3.2: Overview of Interviewees Included

Study 1: Profile of High-Potential Employees					
Code/Name	Gender	Naionality	Company	Years of employment with company	Company Industry
Xiong Wang	Male	Chinese	Bank Co	7 years	Banking
Stella Fang	Female	Chinese	Bank Co	8 years	Banking
Jian Chao	Male	Chinese	Bank Co	10 years	Banking
Bo Guan	Male	Chinese	Bank Co	9 years	Banking
Baoyun Li	Female	Chinese	Bank Co	9 years	Banking
Chi Yo Du	Female	Chinese	Bank Co	8 years	Banking
Christine Yang	Female	Chinese	Logistics Co	10 years	Trans & Log
Josephine Fan	Female	Chinese	Logistics Co	15 years	Trans & Log
Winnie	Female	Chinese	Logistics Co	15 years	Trans & Log
Ivan Chen	Male	Chinese	Logistics Co	10 years	Trans & Log
Michelle Li	Female	Chinese	Oil Co	11 years	Oil & Gas
Ai Xuan Zhu	Female	Chinese	Oil Co	14 years	Oil & Gas
Qian Chen	Female	Chinese	Oil Co	10 years	Oil & Gas
Cong Zhi Zhang	Male	Chinese	Oil Co	10 years	Oil & Gas
Napoleon Wang	Male	Chinese	Oil Co	14 years	Oil & Gas
Chen Xi Liu	Male	Chinese	Oil Co	14 years	Oil & Gas
Jian Qiao Jiao	Male	Chinese	Toy Co	3 years	FMCG
Dorothy Jiang	Female	Chinese	Toy Co	1 year	FMCG
Jie Li	Female	Chinese	Toy Co	1 year	FMCG
Charles Shi	Male	Chinese	Toy Co	1 year	FMCG
Nicole Li	Female	Chinese	Retail Co	14 years	Retail
Lucy	Female	Chinese	Retail Co	4 years	Retail
Xenia Li	Female	Chinese	Retail Co	5 years	Retail
Philip Zhan	Male	Chinese	Retail Co	8 years	Retail

Study 2: Profile of Representatives of Headquarters					
Code/Name	Gender	Naionality	Company	Seniority	Company Industry
Christina Zhu	Female	Chinese	Bank Co	China L&D Lead	Banking
Per Hansen	Male	Scandinavian	Logistics Co	Head of L&D, China	Trans & Log
Conor Walsh	Male	UK	Logistics Co	Chairman of China	Trans & Log
Marie Fan	Female	Chinese	Oil Co	HR Manager in China	Oil &Ggas
Lily Zhao	Female	Chinese	Toy Co	Regional L&D Lead	FMCG
Edmund Brown	Male	UK	Toy Co	VP, P&O, China	FMCG
Casper Wang	Male	Chinese	Retail Co	Senior VP, China	Retail

11

[11] FMGC = Fast Moving Consumer Goods; L&D = Learning and Development; VP = Vice President; HR = Human Resources; P&O = People and Organisation; Trans & Log = Transportation and Logistics.

3.6 Data Analyses

3.6.1 Phenomenographic analysis

As previously mentioned, a universal technique or algorithm for the analysis of phenomenographic research has not been identified. With patience, the researcher must take time to determine the qualitatively different ways in which people experience or conceptualise specific phenomena. As recommended by Marton (1986), after a thorough coding of all the interviews, the next initial phase of the analysis was a type of selection procedure based on criteria of relevance. Quotations considered to be of interest for the question under investigation (for example, 'How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise good leadership and leadership development?') were selected and marked. In certain situations, the meaning of an utterance lies in the utterance itself; however, in general, the interpretation must be made in relation to the context from which it derives. Svensson and Theman (1983) proved that the very same utterances are able to take on different meanings when they appear in different contexts. The phenomenon in question is interpreted in terms of selected quotes from all the interviews. Consequently, the quotes themselves are interpreted and classified in terms of the context from which they are taken.

The selected quotes form a data pool that forms the basis for the next vital step in the analysis. Here, the research focus shifts from the individual subjects (i.e., from the interviewer's attention from which the quotes were abstracted) to the meaning embedded in the quotes themselves. Marton phrased it as follows:

> 'The boundaries separating individuals are abandoned and interest is focused on the "pool of meanings" discovered in the data. Thus, each quote has two contexts in relation to which it has been interpreted: first, the interview from which it was taken, and second, the "pool of meanings" to which it belongs. The interpretation is an interactive procedure which reverberates between these two contexts' (Marton, 1986, p. 43).

Consequently, the result of this interpretive work is that utterances are brought together into categories on the basis of their similarities. Categories, on the other hand, are differentiated from one another in terms of their conceptual differences. More specifically, the process suggested by Marton (1986) looks like this:

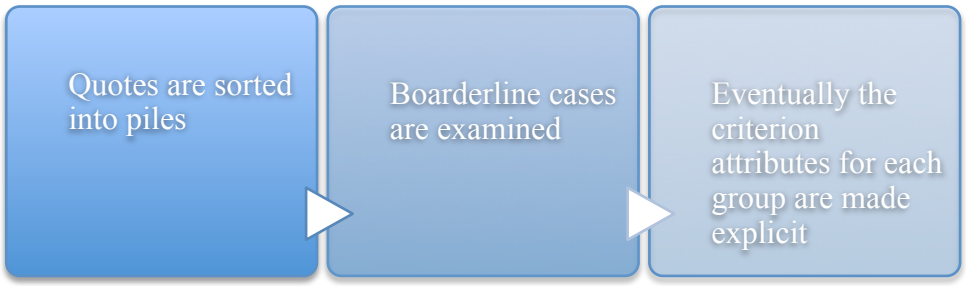

Figure 3.4: Three steps for conceptualising categories

Through these three steps, the groups of quotes are arranged, rearranged, and narrowed into categories, and finally defined in terms of core meanings, as well as borderline cases. Each category is illustrated by quotes from the data.

A crucial distinction between this way of proceeding and traditional content analysis is that content analysis in its traditional form determines categories into which the utterances are sorted in advance. Phenomenographic analysis is dialectical in the sense that meanings are developed in the process of bringing quotes together and comparing them. As meanings of the categories begin to appear, the meanings of the categories decide which quotes should be included and which should be excluded from certain categories. Marton (1986) emphasised that this process is tedious, time-consuming, and interactive. Furthermore, it entails continual sorting and resorting of data, where definitions for categories are tested against the data, adjusted, retested, and adjusted again. However, a central point of the phenomenographic approach is that a decreasing rate of change will eventually stabilise the entire system of meanings (Ibid.). To illustrate this entire process, with reference to the methodological framework of Vermunt (1996, 2005), Table 3.3 outlines the overall iterative process of the data analysis.

Table 3.3: Iterative Process of Data Analysis
1. Thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts
2. Identifying themes
3. Selecting quotes relevant to the themes
4. Comparing quotes within a theme on similarities
5. Forming categories that reflect those differences
6. Re-reading the transcripts
7. Adapting the categories
8. Stabilising the categorical system in the end
9. Describing the essence of each category and the relationships between them
10. Illustrating each category with typical quotations from the data

3.6.2 Phase I Data Analysis

Phenomenographic analysis has, with occasional exceptions (e.g., Bowden & Green, 2005; Bowden & Walsh, 2000), been criticised for not providing a detailed description of its analytical steps. Åkerlind (2012), however, provided a fairly recent and detailed description of this process, which the present study followed.

The first phase of the analysis was a selection procedure. Here, quotations found to be of interest for the three research questions were selected and marked. The meaning of a quotation occasionally lay in the quote itself, but in general, interpretations had to be made in relation to the context from which the quotation was taken. Thus, the phenomenon in question was narrowed down and interpreted in terms of selected quotes from all the interviews.

The selected quotes made up the data pool, which formed the basis for the next important step in the analysis. Here, my attention shifted from the individual interviews from which the quotes originated to the meaning embedded in the quotes themselves. The boundaries separating individuals were abandoned, and instead I focused on the 'pool of meanings' discovered in the data. As argued by Åkerlind (2012), each quote

had two contexts in relation to that which it had been interpreted: first, the interview transcription from which it was taken and, second, the 'pool of meanings' to which it was assigned. As a result of this process, quotations were grouped into 'categories of descriptions' on the basis of their similarities. The 'categories of descriptions' were differentiated from one another in terms of their differences. Put simply, with reference to Marton (1986), the groups of quotes were arranged and rearranged, narrowed into categories, and finally defined.

When assigning the transcripts to particular categories, my focus was on determining the qualitatively different ways in which these interviewees understood leadership and leadership development (the phenomena under investigation). This process was conducted at two levels of analysis. First, I attempted to identify the conception of leadership that was evident in each transcript, and second, I sought to clarify the features of each conception by comparing and contrasting it with the other conceptions that were emerging. After deciding on the categorisation of many of the transcripts, I attempted to describe the most prevalent features of each conception with constant reference to the transcripts.

At each stage of my consideration regarding what characterised each conception, the transcripts were revisited and reread, each time from a slightly different perspective as my initial understanding developed. I sought to formulate more complete and refined descriptions of the conceptions. During this phase, I continually sought evidence within the transcripts that either was consistent with my draft categories or conflicted with them. This procedure was conducted within each transcript so that I always considered the transcript as a whole. Additionally, I searched for commonality from one transcript to another within the same category. Through this process, I drafted and refined the categories, referring back to the relevant transcripts until I felt I had a reasonable stable set of categories (Dall'Alba, 1994). Åkerlind (2012) described this process as occurring in research teams, through which group discussions and challenging each other's perspectives play an important role in stabilising the categories of descriptions. Whilst I did have the opportunity for sharing my thoughts with my supervisors, I was primarily working alone and therefore did not have a research team with whom to establish the categories of descriptions.

3.6.3 Phase II Data Analysis

In the second stage of the data analysis, I revisited the individual transcripts and analysed them in relation to the categories I had constructed. This included an examination of the categorisations, and where there seemed to be mismatches, I returned to the transcript and either adjusted my categories or left the mismatch, depending on my interpretation of the transcripts. This was replicated several times (Prosser, 1994).

When re-reading the transcripts, I had in the back of my mind the question 'What does this tell me about the way the interviewee understands leadership and leadership development?' (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 120). In other words, what must leadership and leadership development mean to the interviewee if he or she is saying this or that? Interviewees often said similar things, but their underlying meaning was different and, likewise, also expressed similar ideas in quite different terms. Bowden (1994) emphasised that these similarities and differences can only be discovered by holding all the ideas in mind at one time, thereby attempting to draw a picture that uncovers the underlying meaning of virtually the entire transcript. Thus, the analysis considered problems as tackled and discussed by all interviewees, and then a selection of a quotation that included particularly interesting ways of handling the problem. This process was repeated and ultimately led to the development of a structure through and across the data that was sharpened and revisited various times until clarity arose (Marton & Booth, 1997). Table 3.4 presents an overview of the stabilised categories of descriptions and themes in relation to the research questions.

Table 3.4: Outcomes of The Data Analysis

Research Question	Theme	Category of Descriptions
1) How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development?	**Conceptions of Leadership** (by Chinese managers)	"Heroic"
		"360 Degree Leadership"
		"Western and Chinese"
		"Heroic with Collective support"
		"Powerful Senior Leaders and Strong Middle Managers"
	Conceptions of Leadership Development (by Chinese managers)	"Dyadic"
		"Team-baed"
		"Building Relationships"
		"Acquiring Knowledge, Skills, and Compentencies"
		"Nationality and Gender-based"
2) Which view on leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development do foreign companies adopt when training leaders in China?	**Conceptions of Leadership** (by Western Headquarters)	"Harmony Searching"
		"Cultural Competence"
		"Heroic"
		"Collaborative and Contextual"
	Views on Pedagogical Approaches to Leadership Development in China (by Western Headquarters)	"Embedded in the Corporate Culture"
		"Programme and Workshop-based"
		"Aligning values defined by Headquarters"
		"A Customised Approach"
		"Learning from China"
		"Nationality-based"
3) To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?	**Successful Perceptions of Leadership Development Initiatives** (by Chinese managers)	"Exposure to Senior Management"
		"Rotation Schemes"
		"Individual Development Plans"
		"Mentoring"
		"Outbalancing Power through Team Work"
	Unsuccessful Perceptions of Leadership Development Initiatives (by Chinese managers)	"Lack of Investment in Top Leaders"
		"Unclear Criteria for Selection"
		"Lack of Purpose"
		"Lack of Cultural Understanding"
		"Using ABCs"

3.7 Validity and Reliability

The terms *validity* and *reliability* are derived from a positivist tradition attempting to uncover an objective reality (Guba, 1981). Despite qualitative scholars often looking into more intersubjective 'realities', they are still traditionally expected to address the notions of validity and reliability in their research (Åkerlind et al., 2005; Kvale, 1996). Consequently, these terms must be reframed within the context of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research approach being utilised. In this section, I outline a set of practices, in line with a phenomenographic approach, describing how validity and reliability were accounted for in the present study.

3.7.1 Validity

In qualitative research, the question of validity has often been associated with the transparency and systemic approach presented (e.g., Dehlholm-Lambertsen & Maunsbach, 1998; Joergensen, Christensen, & Kampmann, 2005). Thus, validity is something that does not belong to a specific part of the research process but infuses the entire process, as opposed to most quantitative research methods. Hence, validity becomes ubiquitous, influencing the character, reasons, methods, and goals of the research, as well as a continuous endeavour for checking for sources of invalidity. Applying such a transparent and systematic approach implies the possibility for the reader, including researchers unfamiliar with the methodology and strategy of analysis, to grasp and follow the argumentation. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) developed a stage-based procedure providing such a framework for ensuring the validity of qualitative studies. This framework is based on six stages, which are presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Validation of Qualitative Studies by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009)

1) Thematising	2) Designing	3) Interviewing	4) Transcribing	5) Analysing	6) Reporting
Soundness of theoretical presumptions Logic of applied theory	Adequacy of design and methods Benefit to humanity.	Trustworthiness of participants Consistently checking the validity of gathered data.	Proper transcription from oral to written languages.	Logic of interpretations.	Forms of validation applied. Does the report provide a valid account of the main findings?

Applying the concept of validity from Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) means that I do not acknowledge the idea of objective and universal research obtainable only through a specific approach. On the contrary, I adhere to the belief that research will always be influenced by the researchers undertaking it because of differences in personalities, beliefs, previous experiences, and the decisions they make during the process.

However, by applying a transparent and systematic approach, such as the one suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), validity becomes an ongoing process of providing clarity to ensure that the reader has the necessary information to understand and undertake an evaluation of the choices of the research process.

Another aspect of validity in qualitative research concerns the extent to which the research outcomes are seen as useful (Kvale, 1996; Sandberg, 1994) and the extent to which they are meaningful to their intended audience (Uljens, 1996). The aim of the research thus turns towards providing useful 'knowledge', where knowledge is defined as the ability to perform effective actions (Kvale, 1996). Consequently, this dissertation explicitly discusses and concludes implications for practice in the final chapter to judge the outcomes in terms of the insights they provide into more effective ways of operating in the world (Entwistle, 1997; Marton, 1986).

3.7.2 Reliability

Akkerman et al. (2006) emphasised how a large number of qualitative studies failed to ensure clear and reliable reporting in their data analyses. They argued that such missing reliability procedures were likely to result in the decreased quality of many qualitative in-depth studies. From a qualitative research perspective, reliability can be viewed as ensuring quality and consistency in data interpretations through the use of appropriate methodological procedures (Guba, 1981; Kvale, 1996). Two prevailing approaches to reliability checks are commonly used in phenomenographic research:

1. *Inter-rater reliability check*: Two researchers independently group a sample of interview transcripts into 'categories of descriptions' and compare categorisations (Åkerlind, 2005; Chi, 1997); and
2. *Dialogic reliability check*: Agreement is reached between researchers through discussion and mutual critique of the data and each researcher's interpretive hypothesis (Bowden, 1996; Prosser, 1994).

In this study, I wanted to capture the variations in interviewees' conceptions of leadership and leadership development. Chi (1997) described how various researchers within education and related fields had found the high level of 'subjectiveness' discouraging. Consequently, Chi presented a guide for using inter-rater reliability checks as a means of integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses to achieve less subjective results. Such an approach has been advocated by various scholars (e.g., Marton, 1996) for establishing a rigorous and replicable analysis. A criticism of employing inter-rater reliability checks is that the many aspects of a phenomenon being investigated are unlikely to be captured in a one-to-one matching of raters; hence, it risks directing attention away from the content (Sandberg, 1994). Consequently, scholars (Bowden, 1996, p. 199; Prosser, 1994) have suggested the 'dialogic reliability' approach to be more appropriate, through which agreement is obtained between a group of researchers over longer periods. Finally, a common alternative to these reliability checks is for the researcher to make interpretive steps clear to readers by fully detailing the steps and presenting examples that illustrate them (Guba, 1981; Sandberg, 1994).

However, this study was conducted as an individual process and not in a team of researchers; my access to other researchers was limited. Additionally, whilst detailing each step of the analysis did increase chances of making the study replicable, it did not provide any tangible support as to how my 'categories of descriptions' could be better constructed. Consequently, to settle on an approach providing a strong rigour in terms of reliability as well as offer the opportunity for obtaining analytical support and 'intersubjectiveness', I adopted inter-rater reliability checks.

First, an external researcher (from a similar field) was introduced to the categories of descriptions and independently asked to place interview transcripts in the categories I had formulated. This approach was in line with Marton's (1981, 1986) distinction between the processes of discovery and verification. To determine the number of

segments required, the rule formulated by Cicchetti (1976) was utilised. The *n* in this rule refers to the number of observational categories. As displayed in Table 3.4, for instance, the themes from Chinese managers' Conceptualisations of leadership, Conceptions of Leadership Development, Perceptions of Successful Leadership Development Initiatives, and Perceptions of Unsuccessful Leadership Development Initiatives each contained five categories of descriptions. The themes derived from employees at the Western headquarters' Conceptions of Leadership and Views on Pedagogical Approaches to Leadership Development in China contained four and six categories of descriptions, respectively. Cicchetti's (1976) rule stated that the number of observations required for a replicable interpretation of a computed kappa should be $2n^2$ or more. Thus, with $N = 4$, 5, or 6 observational categories, the number of observations should be 32, 50, and 72, respectively, or higher. In this study, I used 32, 50, and 72, respectively.

Chi (1997) suggested that in cases of much discrepancy between two raters in the first pass, this should caution the researchers to redefine the categories, rather than to concentrate on resolving the inter-rater discrepancies. Cicchetti, Showalter, and Rosenheck (1997) further proposed that the levels of agreement should be defined as: *poor* (< 70%); *fair* (70–79%); *good* (80–89%); and *excellent* (90–100%). For an overall average agreement, Cicchetti et al. (1997) suggested 84%.

However, in 1960, Jacob Cohen criticised the use of *percent agreement* because of its inability to account for chance agreement. Consequently, he introduced *Cohen's Kappa* (κ), which was developed to account for the possibility that some might just guess on at least some variables in cases of uncertainty. As with most correlation statistics, the kappa can range from −1 to +1. Whilst the kappa is one of the most commonly used statistics to test inter-rater reliability, it does have limitations (McHugh, 2012). Judgments about what level of kappa should be acceptable have been questioned, and consequently, this study reported levels for both kappa and percent agreement. The most common interpretation of kappa results is as follows: .01–.20 (*none to slight*); .21–.40 (*fair*); .41–.60 (*moderate*); .61–.80 (*substantial*); and .81–1.00 (*almost perfect agreement*) (Cohen, 1960; Landis & Koch, 1977).

For 'conceptions of leadership (Chinese managers)', in 45 out of 50 cases, there was 90% agreement between the raters (Cohen's kappa = .87). For 'conceptions of

leadership development (Chinese managers)', in 45 out of 50 cases, there was 90% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .87). For 'conceptions of leadership (Western HQs)', in 29 out of 32 cases, there was 91% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .87). For 'views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China (Chinese managers)', in 64 out of 72 cases there was 89% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .73). For 'perceptions of successful leadership development in China (Chinese managers)', in 44 out of 50 cases there was 88% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .85). For 'perceptions of unsuccessful leadership development in China (Chinese managers)', in 42 out of 50 cases there was 84% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .80). The total average of all themes was 89% agreement (Cohen's kappa = .83). Table 3.6 presents these findings.

Table 3.6: Reported Kappa and Percentage Agreement Levels

	Percentage Agreement		Kappa Agreement (κ)	
Theme	% Percentage	Level of Agreement	Value of Kappa (κ)	Level of Agreement
Conceptions of Leadership (Chinese Managers)	90%	"Excellent"	.87	"Almost perfect agreement"
Conceptions of Leadership Development (Chinese Managers)	90%	"Excellent"	.87	"Almost perfect agreement"
Conceptions of Leadership (Western HQs)	91%	"Excellent"	.87	"Almost perfect agreement"
Views on Pedagogical Approaches to Leadership Development in China (Western HQs)	89%	"Good"	.73	"Substantial"
Successful Perceptions of Leadership Developemnt in China (Chinese Managers)	88%	"Good"	.85	"Almost perfect agreement"
Unsuccessful Perceptions of Leadership Developemnt in China (Chinese Managers)	84%	"Good"	.80	"Substantial"
Average in total	**89%**	**"Good"**	**.83**	**"Almost perfect agreement"**

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the ethical concerns involved in conducting social science research for psychological and educational purposes, which in this case was on adult members of global enterprises. First, I argue that the craftsmanship of social science research is closely connected to the practical skill of situated judgment. Subsequently, the ethical guidelines particularly relevant to the context of this study are highlighted and discussed.

3.8.1 The Practical Skill of Situated Judgment

Aristotle (1994) argued that good ethical practice in research does not primarily aim to formulate universal theory about morality, but rather has the practical aim of making us good people. According to Aristotle (1994), scientific knowledge or ethical standardised principles are not what is required to be practically wise in moral matters. Instead, as a description of good ethical practice, Aristotle (1994) suggested the term *phronesis*, a practical wisdom that can be said to involve the skill of seeing and describing events in their value-laden contexts and judging accordingly.

As such, the social science researcher should primarily cultivate the ability to perceive and judge, using practical wisdom to be ethically proficient, rather than mechanically following universal rules. This researcher should engage in contextualised methods of reasoning rather than calculating from abstract principles. The concept of *phronesis* does not equal abandoning rules and principles completely. Whereas moral rules should not be seen as authoritative in themselves, they are descriptive summaries of good judgments valid only insofar as they are justified and chosen for the context by the researcher. Consequently, Nussbaum (1986) referred to the researcher as ‘the wise perceiving agent’. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argued that Nussbaum's (1986) description of the ‘wise perceiving agent’ can be read not just as a description of an ethical ideal but just as much as a description of an ideal researcher in the social sciences, one who knows the subject matter well and can engage in contextualised moral reasoning. In the next subsection, I outline which ethical guidelines that I, in striving towards the role as a ‘wise perceiving agent’, chose to emphasise in this particular study.

3.8.2 Ethical Guidelines

In general, this study follows the ethical guidelines of BERA (2011) and the Ethics Committee BPS (2009). Because explicit attention to all these standards would be far too comprehensive for a study of this scope to list in detail, two points are emphasised, which deserve explicit consideration particularly for this context. These two points were chosen with reference to similar studies on cross-cultural leadership development (see Gagnon & Collinson, 2014, and Liu, Hu, Li, Wang, & Lin, 2013).

Point 1.4 (ii) in the Ethics Committee BPS (2009) and point 15 in BERA's guidelines (2011) refer to the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants are aware of their right to withdraw at any time from research participation. In this study, the right to withdraw deserves explicit attention. Expressing personal opinions about one's own professional practice to a researcher may result in vital consequences for the employee, and thus, it is crucial that the participant does not feel forced to participate at any given point. The employees interviewed in this study have in most cases been recruited through the Chairman in China or a Vice President (VP) of the enterprises. Therefore, the right to withdraw may be particularly difficult to ensure because the employees are likely to feel pressure to participate from their respective VPs or Chairmen.

Furthermore, it should be explicitly stated how this study keeps to point 25 of BERA (2011) and point 1.2 of the Ethics Committee BPS (2009), regarding privacy and confidentiality. With reference to Liu et al.'s (2013) research on leadership development in China, I argue that privacy and confidentiality are crucial factors in terms of making adult employees feel safe to speak up. Some of the interview questions might address sensitive and critical information regarding leadership issues of the participant's organisation, job position, or even the role of senior management. In this study, such information can be critical for an employee to share, and in the worst case even jeopardise his or her position in the company. Therefore, it appears plausible that an environment in which employees do not feel safe to speak up would either cause a bad experience when answering the interview questions or simply lead participants to answer untruthfully.

Through an information sheet (see Appendix ‘A1’) and a signed informed consent form (see Appendix ‘A2’) prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the overall purpose and procedures of the research. This entailed information about the design as well as possible risks and benefits of participating. Furthermore, the informed consent form strove to obtain voluntary participation of the people involved, informing them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, this document stated that any participants and enterprises would be fully anonymised; thus, private data would not be recognised or disclosed. This was done to secure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

The openness and intimacy of qualitative research may be seductive and lead participants to disclose information they later may regret having shared (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Consequently, after the interviews, participants received a debrief sheet(see Appendix ‘A3’reminding them of their right to withdraw and providing information about how to get in contact in case any questions or doubts arose.

CHAPTER 4 – Employee Conceptualisations

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the empirical findings linked to Research Question 1 of this dissertation:

1. How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development?

This question is explored using descriptions from Phase II of the data collection (see Section 3.5.2). From the interviews with 24 Chinese managers, six themes were identified:

1. Five conceptions of leadership;
2. Evaluative perspectives on leadership conceptions;
3. Logical reasoning underlying leadership conceptions;
4. Five conceptions of leadership development;
5. Evaluative perspectives on leadership development conceptions; and
6. Concepts relevant for leadership and leadership development in China.

4.2 Five Conceptions of Leadership

In this section, I describe five categories of leadership derived from the interviews with 24 Chinese managers. These categories are based on an analysis of responses to the following questions: 'What is leadership to you?'; 'What is "Chinese" leadership to you?'; 'What is leadership in your company?'; and 'What do you believe leadership is in "foreign" companies?'. The five categories are thus empirically derived. In the following subsections, these categories and their differences and similarities are presented and analysed.

4.2.1 Conception 1: Leadership as 'Heroic'

From the first perspective, 'heroic', leadership is seen as hierarchical, top-down, and controlling. The quotations in this category provide a picture of a type of leadership driven by an inspirational and charismatic person, who is able to motivate employees whilst maintaining strict control over tasks. The leader thus carries all responsibility, makes critical decisions by him or herself, and inspires employees to perform 'beyond contract'. Followers, in this model, obey the leader and do precisely what they are told, and a limited number of strict key performance indicators (KPIs) tend to be assigned to subordinates. Due to a strong charisma, exemplary behaviour, and the ability to succeed, this type of leader is able to inspire employees to act in line with company values and practices. However, in return for being given power, the heroic leader must show responsibility and care towards subordinates. The interviewees associated this type of leadership with Chinese state-owned enterprises and 'home-grown' Chinese companies.

One interviewee emphasised heroic leadership as an inherent part of Chinese culture and argued that emperors and kings throughout history had been promoted as essential figures for leading the country to success:

> '… in the Chinese bank culture, they picture the leader as a hero … In Chinese culture it is a habit, if you look at the Chinese history, we always worship someone, particularly like a king, or an emperor. So, in the big Chinese companies, they also prefer to broadcast or cultivate this kind of culture. For example, a senior leader in charge who generated profits, or whatsoever, would be mentioned a lot in the daily work. Yeah, so the culture in itself, it really prefers to create a hero' (Jian Chao, Bank Co, HPE).

Notably, this interviewee perceived heroic leadership not just as practiced in some modern Chinese companies but also as deeply embedded in the cultural roots of China and in the way in which Chinese employees think about leadership. Another quotation concerned the type of tasks associated with heroic leadership:

> '… the KPIs defined by the leader are also totally different. When I was in the local Chinese bank, the only KPI was the deposit, how much deposit you can get. That's the only KPI. But in foreign banks, we have several KPIs in terms of revenue, assets, liabilities etc.' (Bo Guan, Bank Co, HPE).

This description of limited KPIs illustrated the role of the followers. In particular, this quotation highlighted that KPIs assigned under heroic leadership in local Chinese companies were strictly defined; hence, the variety of the working tasks was limited compared with foreign banks. Additionally, a third quotation concerned the availability of subordinates:

> 'Chinese leadership is more top-down. They just give directions … not only in SOEs, but in Chinese private multinational companies as well … It's beyond your imagination how they really direct their business from the top and down, and then you have to respond 24 hours a day' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

This interviewee described that subordinates in this model, despite few KPIs, were exposed to demanding requirements in terms of being available every hour of the day. This description is comparable to a monarch who requires full-time attention from his or her servants.

The descriptions above mostly concern the privileges of leaders. However, a fourth quotation illustrated the responsibilities that accompany being awarded power:

> '… from my own observations with JD.com or Alibaba [examples of big Chinese companies][12], their top leaders are very ambitious with their targets and everybody is working hard for these targets. I think this is where the leader is the 'hero of the company'. I think they do not blame people or make them feel uncomfortable. They believe in their ambitions and that this is something they can reach. They also strongly encourage their employees to take part in the company's success. So it is another way [to Western companies]' (Jian Qiao Jiao, Toy Co, HPE).

This view is crucial because it adds another dimension to the heroic leader than just being demanding and stringent. In return for being given power, the heroic leader must express a human-hearted type of care (*rén* 仁) towards subordinates and encourage them to feel a part of the company's success. How this combination of strict control and care might be interpreted will be a central theme later in this chapter.

[12] Square brackets are used to provide clarification.

4.2.2 Conception 2: Leadership as '360 Degree'

According to the second conception, '360 degree', leadership is shared across the various organisations of the company. Thus, leaders encourage democracy and participation, and decisions are made in collaboration between different functions and seniorities. In this model, knowledge and opinions are shared in friendly and safe learning environments. Opposed to the previous conception, leaders at various levels are encouraged and required to possess a strategic internal overview as well as cross-functionally to contribute ideas and suggestions regarding the company's future targets and practices. The group of interviewees holding this conception consistently reported that this version of leadership was particularly common in Western companies.

One quotation focused on the implications this type of leadership had for decision-making within the company:

> 'In Oil Co, no one can make a big decision alone. It is always a decision of across functions; the entire team. So, the senior leader's job becomes to get all the ideas aligned and set up the region and the long-term targets. Then the whole team works together on the target. So, we don't think any VP is a hero. The leader is just a steering wheel … everything is a joint decision. It's not any single person's decision' (Michelle Li, Oil Co, HPE).

A central point of this quotation is that decisions were made across functions in collaboration with the entire team, to ensure all possible views and ideas were expressed. Subsequently, it was seen as the job of the leader to align these ideas as best they can to support the company's long-term targets. A second quotation highlighted that this approach to leadership was associated with the practice of Western leaders:

> 'Western leaders are more about delegation of leadership. If you look into international companies like Logistics Co, I think the leadership style is more international, more "Westernised" and democratic' (Ivan Chen, Logistics Co, HPE).

Finally, a third interviewee emphasised that knowledge sharing between different layers of the organisation and between different functions was key for this type of leadership:

> 'In my company, leadership is first of all about leading the team with transparent and honest sharing, all the time, and trying to create this kind of sharing environment, not

only from top and down, but also from the lower levels and up, and between peers, between functions' (Lucy, Retail Co, HPE).

Consequently, as this quotation illustrates, leaders on all levels were encouraged and expected to voice their opinions to peers, followers, and senior leaders above their own positions, within and across functions.

4.2.3 Conception 3: Leadership as 'Western and Chinese'

To achieve a more nuanced understanding of the interviewees' mental models of leadership, they were shown the 'six paradigms of leadership framework' (Appendix 'B3'). They were then asked to rank statements representing the six different leadership paradigms and, with this ranking in mind, answer the question 'What is leadership to you?'. Whereas the two previous conceptions of leadership related to quite specific practices in China and the West, this forced choice methodology (see Chapter 3) aimed to achieve an understanding of the interviewees' fundamental conceptualisations of leadership. The top three rankings amongst all the participants are displayed in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Ranking of Leadership Paradigms[13]

		1) Individual Leadership	2) Contextual Leadership	3) New Leadership	4) Collective Leadership	5) Followers	6) Post-modern Leadership
Bank	Xiong Wang						
	Stella Fang		1	3	2		
	Jian Chao	1	2	3			
	Bo Guan	2	1	3			
	Baoyun Li		2	3	1		
	Chi Yo Du		2	3	1		
Logistics	Christine Yang		2		1	3	
	Josephine Fan		3	1	2		
	Winnie	1			2	3	
	Ivan Chen	2		1			3
Oil	Michelle Li		1	3	2		
	Ai Xuan Zhu	1		2			3
	Qian Chen						
	Cong Zhi Zhang		2	3	1		
	Napoleon Wang		3	1	2		
	Chen Xi Liu			3		2	1
Toy	Jian Qiao Jiao	1			2	3	
	Dorothy Jiang		1	3	2		
	Jie Li		2	3	1		
	Charles Shi		1	3	2		
Retail	Nicole Li		3	1	2		
	Lucy		1	3	2		
	Xenia Li						
	Philip Zhan	2	3	1			

1	1st priority
2	2nd priority
3	3rd priority

The interviewees holding the third conception of leadership as 'Western and Chinese' ranked the leadership paradigms as follows: (1) collective; (2) contextual; and (3) heroic, as shown in Table 4.1. In this view, collective leadership is generally associated with Western leaders and heroic leadership with Chinese leaders. Thus, these Chinese HPEs were inspired by their Western employers' leadership practices while working

[13] The categories in Table 4.1 were established from the leadership paradigms described in the literature review (Chapter 2). For more information, see the methodology section in Chapter 3.

there. However, in situations where the Western leadership practices appeared insufficient, they would return to their 'Chinese roots' because of a strong awareness of Chinese history. Thus, in this view, leaders must be aware of how to combine Western and Chinese leadership, which is why contextual leadership capabilities are also considered crucial. Compared with the two previous categories, the characteristics of this third type of leadership are a complex mix of collective, contextual, and heroic leadership. In other words, it is a combination of hierarchical and democratic ways of thinking about leadership.

The following quotation illustrates this view by first emphasising collective leadership and the importance of establishing strong teams, in which employees work constructively together. Second, this interviewee indicated the need for adjusting the style of leadership to different contexts:

> 'I think I may be choosing number four [collective leadership] in the first place. We are socialised animals; we need to do things together. The leader must use all techniques and soft skills of the team members. Because at my job, we do not have Ma Yuen[14] [laughs] … "contextual leadership" could be the second one. The leader needs to be able to change style when facing different people and different situations. … I think I have been heavily impacted by Western companies. I have only been three years in a state-owned company and much longer with the MNCs. They have changed my mind a lot, yeah, brain washed me' (Chi Yo Du, Bank Co, HPE).

Whilst acknowledging the strengths of collective and contextual leadership, the same interviewee later portrayed the importance of a heroic leader who could inspire his employees to perform 'beyond contract'.

> 'Third, I choose "heroic leadership". We cannot just change people. In China, we have got so many thousands of years of history, we have been trained like this through our parents, parents' parents, and our school all educated us to perform like this, we cannot just change it … It's true I said I was brainwashed to some extent, but when I talk, I'm also still acting in a Chinese way. When I'm talking with my boss, I will consider being soft, not speak with too harsh words to the others, you know? So, actually by nature there are a lot of aspects around leadership we cannot change' (Chi Yo Du, Bank Co, HPE).

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[14] 'Ma Yuen' is the Chinese name for Jack Ma, the CEO of Alibaba.

Thus, the interviewee generally associated 'collective' and 'contextual' leadership with the practice of leaders in Western companies. The interviewee explicitly indicated that having worked with a Western company for several years had influenced her view on leadership. However, in the second interview quote, she reported that the 'heroic' style of leadership practiced in Chinese companies also played an essential role in her way of thinking about leadership. The interviewee explained this with a strong awareness of Chinese history and the manner in which leadership has been practiced throughout it. Another interviewee reported a similar view on leadership, in which she further stressed that, particularly in difficult times, she would return to her Chinese roots and adhere to the way leadership is practiced there:

> 'First of all, the leader needs to find a good team. The leader needs to know how to motivate them and empower them, to find out who is good at what and then delegate. A good leader needs to have contextual abilities too. Sometimes there is no time for discussion, you need to make a decision, and the leader must take the responsibility …. We don't necessarily need a strong and heroic leader in our day-to-day performance, here we don't think about that. But at the critical moments, the leader needs to step up and show the direction. Here they need to inspire the subordinates, they need to give them some tasks, and they just go and figure out the answers' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

A crucial finding of this study is that leadership was not conceived of by these interviewees as an 'either or' activity, in which a permanent choice must be made between either a hierarchical or collective leadership style. Instead, a more complex view of leadership was reported, which combined Western and Chinese approaches to leadership.

4.2.4 Conception 4: Leadership as 'Heroic Leadership with Collective Support'

In the fourth category descriptions, 'heroic leadership with collective support', the interviewees defined leadership with reference to the heroic and collective paradigms (see Table 4.1). Here, leadership is first and foremost about inspiring followers through a vision and setting clear directions for how followers can achieve their targets. This type of leadership motivates employees to follow the leader's vision. Additionally,

collective leadership is perceived to help alleviate the potential of the workforce and plays a crucial role in ensuring the blind spots of senior management are uncovered. As with the previous conceptions, a common characteristic is that leadership is a mixture of hierarchical and collective practices. However, as opposed to them, this version of leadership describes heroic behaviour as the most critical component of leadership. This view is illustrated by the following quote:

> 'First of all, the leader should have a strong vision and then be able to set a clear direction. A leader should be able to motivate people. Make sure people follow him or her … If we only have one definition of a leader, it would be that you need to have followers. I think it is an undisputed criterion. At the same time, I believe that the leader should be very inclusive too. The leader needs to create this culture for the company, so everyone can contribute collaboratively. So, setting a clear vision and really empowering people is important' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

This quotation highlights the idea that the most important tasks of a leader are to define a vision and give clear directions to subordinates. Secondly, the interviewee mentioned the importance of making followers work collaboratively, as well as ensuring that everyone contributes positively. A second quotation similarly defined leadership as a combination of heroic and collective processes. However, this interviewee further argued that the reason why collaborative leadership is required, in addition to heroic leadership, is to ensure to uncover potential 'blind spots' of senior management:

> 'A leader needs to have a strong vision and be able to inspire people. So this [new leadership] is definitely the first one … My second priority would be about empowerment. Leadership is a collective process and it is important to distribute leadership, and responsibility, so that employees can work well in teams … Many strong leaders also make foolish mistakes and wrong decisions, they still have their blind spots … Therefore, a leader must make sure to empower the employees collectively too' (Napoleon Wang, Oil Co, HPE).

Thus, leadership in this view was mainly perceived as heroic. However, because no management is infallible, a collaborative working environment was encouraged too. In such an environment employees on all levels are capable of contributing as well as sharing views and opinions to reduce the risk for making mistakes.

4.2.5 Conception 5: Leadership as 'Powerful Senior Leaders and Strong Middle Managers'

The interviewees holding the fifth and final conception, 'powerful senior leaders and strong middle managers', ranked the leadership paradigms as follows: (1) new; (2) individual; and (3) post-modern, as shown in Table 4.1. This view on leadership has quite a few things in common with the previous conception because of its emphasis on strong, inspirational, and heroic leadership. However, in this view, a leader is also defined by other specific individual personality traits, such as being emotionally stable, dominant, able to establish trust, able to provide clear communication, powerful, and energetic. Finally, this view assigns paramount importance to enabling middle managers and creating a culture for them to confidently speak up in support of senior leaders. Whereas the previous conception responded to the need of helping senior management to uncover their 'blind spots' by establishing collective leadership throughout the entire organisation, this view focuses on establishing a strong and competent group of middle managers to support senior management. One quotation described this view as follows:

> 'A leader must be inspiring. We need the energy to spark other people's potential …. In Chinese we say that you must take care of yourself, shape yourself first, before you can look after your family and look after your country. This relates to developing yourself into being a powerful and visionary leader who can motivate followers and inspire others … I also tend to agree with these very important characteristics for a leader [Individual leadership]. Especially being emotionally stable will give people the impression that the leader has got things under control; that gives people confidence …. Finally, empowering the middle management is very important. A multinational company is like a kingdom. We don't work with the CEO everyday, so we cannot just rely on his style, but we must look at the middle management too. I think that is very important' (Ai Xuan Zhu, Oil Co, HPE).

This quotation described leadership, above all, as an individual project. First, it was considered necessary for the leader to develop heroic attributes and certain personal traits to be able to take on the job of a leader. Subsequently, this interviewee described the importance of middle managers supporting the top management. The following interview quote supports this view by adhering to powerful and visionary leadership and personality traits. Additionally, this interviewee argued that because of a lack of

emotional stability amongst many senior leaders, it was necessary to establish a group of competent middle managers to support senior management:

> 'I believe that a leader's most important task is to achieve results. That's why this person needs to be powerful and visionary so they can motivate the followers to perform "beyond contract". At the same time, the personality traits of the leaders are very important. Sometimes they need to be dominant and sometimes they must be energetic and of course emotionally stable. A lot of leaders are not emotionally stable. This is why a team of strong middle managers is also very important' (Ivan Chen, Logistics Co, HPE).

In agreement with the previous two conceptions, the interview quotes in this category portrayed leadership as a combination of hierarchical and collaborative processes.

4.2.6 Comparing Conceptions

To summarise the empirical part of this study thus far, various perceptions of leadership were reported. In this chapter, I have identified common points between these views and grouped them into categories. During the interviews, the interviewees occasionally stepped in and out of different views, and thus could adhere to multiple conceptions. After I had interviewed all 24 participants, I identified the following five conceptions of leadership:

1. Leadership as 'heroic';
2. Leadership as '360 Degree';
3. Leadership as 'Western and Chinese';
4. Leadership as 'heroic leadership with collective support'; and
5. Leadership as 'powerful senior leaders and strong middle managers'.

A critical question at this point is of course the nature of the differences between these conceptions. To be brief, there seem to be at least two fundamental differences underlying the five conceptions. The first of these is how some conceptualisations of leadership were more aligned with what is perceived as 'Western leadership', whereas other interviewees conceptualised leadership in alignment with what is described as 'Chinese leadership'. Secondly, a prominent feature of conceptions 3, 4, and 5 is that the

interviewees holding them did not view any conflict in adhering to different leadership theories simultaneously. In fact, in these conceptions, to varying extents, the different leadership paradigms were described as complimentary rather than contradictory. Thus, these three conceptions portray an image where the 'Western democratic leadership styles' and 'Chinese hierarchical styles' described in conceptions 1 and 2 are combinable. By contrast, the essence of conceptions 1 and 2 seems to lie very much in the emphasis of whether leadership was described as either heroic and individual or collective and contextual (i.e., Chinese or Western).

4.3 Evaluative Perspectives on Leadership Conceptions

The previous section provided a conceptual framework for how the notion of leadership was understood by the 24 interviewees. I now move on to analyse more evaluative views. The procedure through which these descriptions were arrived at is an analysis of the answers to the questions: 'What do you actually think good leadership is?' and 'What types of leadership do you find effective?'. Moreover, the interviewees were asked about their experiences with good and bad leadership in China and the West. Thus, this section moves on from elucidating what the interviewees think leadership is to what they believe good and bad leadership is in China and the West.

4.3.1 Negative Views on Chinese Leadership

Throughout the collected data, positive and negative impressions of leadership in Chinese companies were reported. According to the interviewees, the heroic leadership practiced in Chinese companies possessed various pitfalls. In general, the interviewees' criticisms of heroic leadership concerned the view that such a hierarchical structure, in their experience, often resulted in a less transparent and vibrant working environment with simple, micro-managed tasks. Additionally, the interviewees described leaders in this corporate culture as dominating and authoritarian. In various cases, the reason why the interviewees originally chose to work with a Western-based company was their negative impressions of the Chinese heroic leadership style. The following quotation indicates how Chinese leaders expect subordinates to constantly be on standby creates

an inefficient culture and wastes a lot of time. It was a central point of this interview that the requirement of obeying the leader resulted in many Chinese employees preferring to work for Western companies:

> 'I worked on some projects with Chinese entrepreneurs. They are very successful entrepreneurs, but you just could not really fit into their culture. … They can call you at any time, and you should be ready for meeting, even during the weekend. And you are supposed to wait in a meeting room for hours. Just wait for the boss to show up, and he never tells you beforehand when he is going to show up. You're supposed to wait in there, and then wait until he gives the message. So that's why I don't believe in this type of corporate culture, and I don't think it is effective. I think many of the people working in foreign companies also tend to prefer the Western corporate culture' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

Another interview quote supported this view and additionally reported that the limited number of KPIs given by leaders in Chinese companies, from the interviewee's experience, resulted in less vibrant and more rigid working tasks than the ones provided in Western companies:

> '… as opposed to Chinese banks, foreign banks set up several KPIs in terms of revenue, assets, liabilities etc. So the motivation is also different between local and foreign banks, because the foreign bank culture is more vibrant and motivating and less rigid than Chinese banks' (Bo Guan, Bank Co, HPE).

Finally, a third quotation associated Chinese leadership with a lack of transparency. This interviewee reported that Chinese leaders tended to give out orders without including subordinates in their broader strategic considerations, which was perceived as frustrating:

> 'I don't like such a kind of culture [Chinese top-down control]. It is all about power … Often the leader won't consider different situations and he often brings personal emotions into the position. We don't know which kind of strategy that comes from or where. We just know that this is the order, and we have to obey. These are the instructions from the guy in the high position. We get no more background, which is very frustrating' (Baoyun Li, Bank Co, Employee).

These negative views all had implications for the Chinese employees choosing to work for Western companies, as opposed to for Chinese companies.

4.3.2 What Western Leaders Can Learn from Chinese Leadership

Whilst the abovementioned quotations portrayed Chinese heroic leadership negatively, a contrasting and more positive view was reported as well. Here, the interviewees indicated that in the past, Chinese companies had been highly successful because of their heroic leadership style, which generally was perceived as more effective than Western practices. These interviewees agreed that in situations where hierarchical leadership works, it works very well. In such cases, the Chinese companies were considered as able to implement ideas and deliver clear results significantly quicker than their Western competitors. It was a central point that Western companies often tended to debate and discuss matters for too long, and thus they could benefit from incorporating aspects of the more heroic leadership style of the Chinese companies into their practices. Finally, the interviewees reported that Chinese heroic leaders were fundamentally superior to Western leaders at understanding and handling local clients as well as developing governmental relationships in China. As a consequence, the interviewees recommended Western leaders to become more informed about the benefits associated with Chinese leadership practices. This view is reflected in the following quote:

> 'I also look at the Chinese companies and they are very successful. They are very big businesses, right? I think it's really their culture, their approaches work well with them … I mean, some of the state-owned companies come from military backgrounds, and here you are required just to follow. But to a certain degree, if the culture is that everyone follows and just listens to the instruction from the leader, then employees are more disciplined in that way, and they can deliver much quicker' (Ai Xuan Zhu, Oil Co, HPE).

In this quote, the interviewee argued that the leadership practiced in Chinese companies was generally more effective than that in Western companies. In particular, the authoritarian way of giving orders and establishing a disciplined culture was described as increasing effectiveness in decision-making and the delivery of results. In a second quotation, another interviewee argued that Western leaders had things to learn from Chinese leaders in that Chinese heroic leaders were more effective at closing down discussions and considerations once a decision had been made:

> ‘The Chinese SOEs are much more efficient in their leadership style. In our company people are arguing and arguing. It’s good to have a debate before a decision is made that involves all the different opinions, and view ideas from different angles and perspectives. But once the decision is taken, it needs to be implemented and there is no more time to argue … There are also democratic processes in the state-owned companies. They also call people together to present their ideas and proposals, leaders from different functions and different levels … Western multinational companies have a lot to learn from Chinese companies, especially in the area of once a decision is made, then there is really no time or space to discuss further. In this way, the Chinese more heroic leadership is really good and very different from Western leadership’ (Chen Xi Liu, Oil Co, HPE).

This quote supports the idea that leadership in Chinese companies is more efficient than that in Western companies. This quote is critical because it further highlights that Chinese companies do have democratic debates and share opinions before a decision is made. According to this view, however, such democratic processes were significantly shorter in Chinese companies, which created an efficiency that Western leaders could learn from instead of striving for everyone’s opinion to be heard before making a decision. Finally, a third interviewee mentioned that Chinese leaders were more effective at establishing constructive relationships with the government and local clients in China, which was considered of paramount importance for succeeding in the Chinese market:

> ‘Companies like Alibaba and COFCO, for instance, are very successful. It is because their leaders are Chinese. The Chinese people fully understand the Chinese culture and they have a very, very deep and good relationship with the government. I don’t mean that Retail Co doesn’t have a good relationship with the government, but it’s different. We can call each other partners, but we are not real friends. Between Chinese people, leaders from different organisations can make good friends. Having a friendship with the government, that’s different than the relation Westerners have. Western leaders cannot do that’ (Xenia Li, Retail Co, HPE).

This view has implications for the necessity of acquiring local talent and learning from their leadership practices when conducting business in China. An overview of the pros and cons of the different styles of leadership are displayed in Table 4.2.

4.3.3 Positive Views on Western Leadership

During the interviews, the participants commented on the pros and cons of Western leadership. In general, the positive comments contained a fundamental appreciation of the democratic and participatory styles of leadership they had experienced in Western companies. In particular, these interviewees appreciated the manner in which their Western leaders encouraged the sharing of knowledge in honest and friendly learning environments. This type of leadership was consistently described as being in direct contrast to the type of leadership practiced in Chinese companies. The following quote illustrates this appreciation of the democratic values associated with Western participatory leadership:

> 'This participatory and democratic leadership is the values and the culture we have, and in companies like Logistics Co, we treasure this culture and that is one of the main reasons for some of the colleagues who stay with the company as well' (Ivan Chen, Logistics Co, HPE).

It is interesting to note that, in this view, Western participatory leadership and the culture it creates was a central reason for the Chinese employees choosing to work in the company. Another interviewee supported this view and espoused a particular appreciation for the transparent knowledge sharing and coaching initiatives utilised in Western leadership initiatives:

> 'In China, most of the employees think that Oil Co is a respectful company and they have a very good democratic culture with coaching and transparent knowledge sharing that local companies do not have' (Michelle Li, Oil Co, HPE).

Finally, a third interviewee supported the positive aspects of the transparency and transparent knowledge sharing in Western companies in the following quote. This further highlighted how such a style of leadership is in direct contrast to Chinese practices:

> '… In China, we try to always communicate in a positive way and hide the bad things. So if you are a foreign leader in such in a big company, nobody will tell you the truth about how they think or how a decision can lead to bad results. Even if they know, they will never tell you, because you are the leader. They will not honestly voice their opinions or solutions to a problem. So, as a leader, I really like our transparent sharing

> of things and our honest environment. This is between everyone in the team, between the colleagues on my level, and with the higher managers, even to the top layers, the Directors and so on. I really value this kind of free and outspoken environment because it helps me ensure that I make the right decisions' (Lucy, Retail Co, HPE).

Overall, an noteworthy finding of this study is that the interviewees seemed to welcome and appreciate the participatory and collective Western approaches to leadership.

4.3.4 Negative Views on Western Leadership

Although the abovementioned descriptions emphasised the positive aspects of Western types of leadership, negative perceptions were reported as well. In general, these descriptions highlighted how too much trust in employees often resulted in a loss of control. In particular, the interviewees reported that this loss of control blurred the objectives and targets that the companies aimed to reach, which consequently generated a lack of motivation for pursuing them. The following interviewee mentioned how a trust-based leadership approach in her company caused an unfortunate lack of control over the employees' behaviour:

> 'I think the "Toy Co way of leading" is very trust-based. And that's why we suffer a lot. We make a lot of mistakes and we need to find a balance between trust and control. We need to use assessment to control, rather than just trust everyone [*provides a confidential example of where the trust was misused by an employee for personal financial gain*]. Toy Co thought we needed to trust people, and give them opportunities to grow and change. I don't think so. In one way, I think a trust basis is a very good thing, it's a good DNA of Toy Co, but on the other hand, everyone becomes less aggressive in pursuing the company objectives if we don't have strict goals' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

This view is important because it described how everyone being able to act freely resulted in blurred expectations of employees' performance. Consequently, this interview quote suggests applying a more controlling leadership style with a limited distribution of trust. A second interviewee mentioned a similar tendency:

> 'In Western companies, we spend a lot of time debating and discussing, until we are tired of discussing. No matter whether I agree or not, I just say I agree [laughs]. When the decision is made, I just work; I will not complain … I will not afterwards challenge

> back. I will not cause obstacles. Sometimes it would be better if the leader just said "OK,let's do it this way" instead of always debating …. It is better to deliver than not to deliver' (Ai Xuan Zhu, Oil Co, HPE).

This quote illustrates how freedom of speech often caused long demotivating discussions that forced the interviewee to express agreement, even in situations where this was not the case, just to avoid any further discussion. This view is important because encouraging Chinese employees to express themselves freely and honestly had the opposite effect to its intention.

In sum, whilst some participants did appreciate the collective Western approaches to leadership, others reported that too great a distribution of leadership caused blurred objectives and a lack of motivation. Table 4.2 displays an overview of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of Western and Chinese leadership.

Table: 4.2: Overview of the pros and cons of Western and Chinese leadership styles.

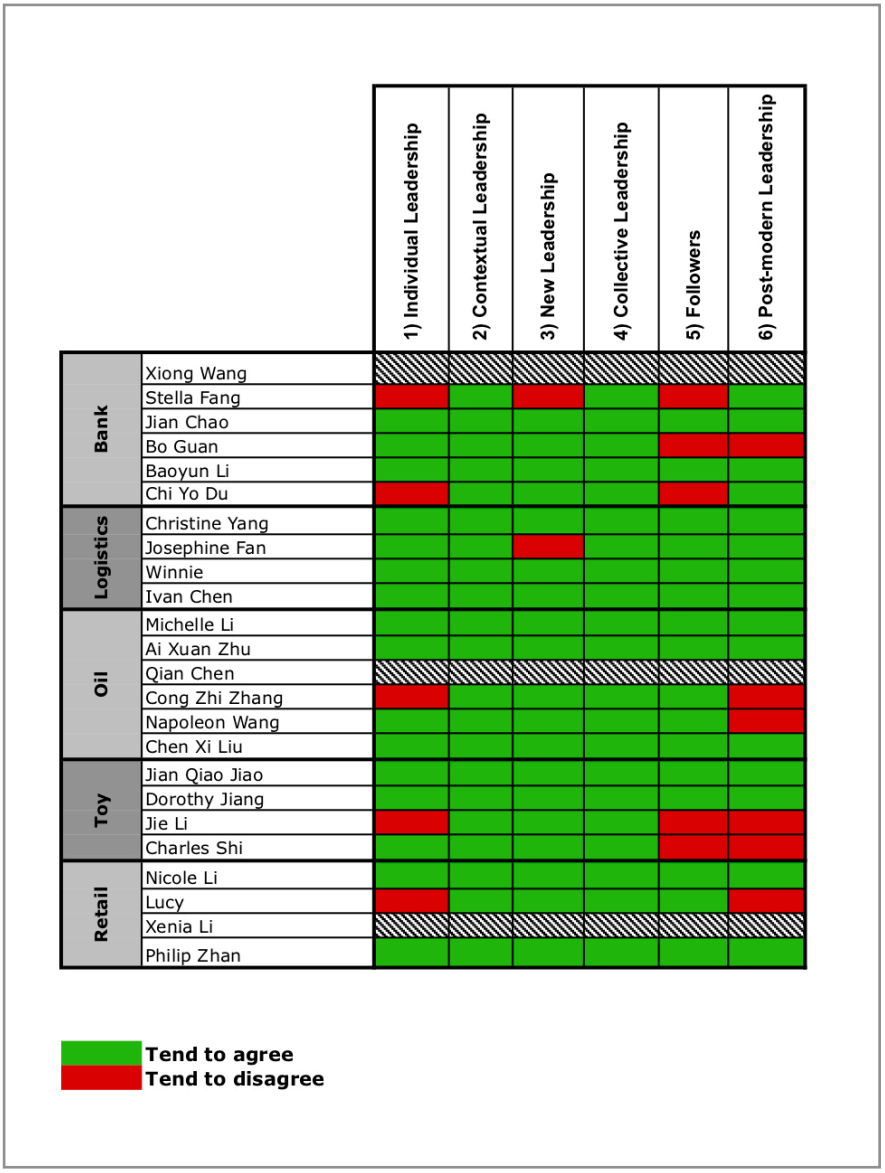
Chinese Leadership	
PROS +	**CONS -**
More effective and disciplined leadership	Lack of transparency of strategy and target setting
Quicker at implementing ideas and deliver results	Micro managed targets
Less wasted time on debating in decision-making	Less vibrant working environment
Leaders are more ambitious and target oriented	Leaders are dominating and authoritarian (unpleasant power relations)
Leaders are more inspirational and encouraging to subordinates	Leaders require for subordinates to wait a lot and to always be available
Leaders are better at handling local clients and governmental relations	
Western Leadership	
PROS +	**CONS -**
Freedom provided by democratic and participatory leadership styles	Too much trust in employees can be exploited and damage discipline
Sharing knowledge	Loss of control of employees
Transparent strategy and goal setting	Too much individual autonomy destroy sense of community and shared goals
	Less inspiring and motivating leaders

To better understand the complexity of these views, examining the (logical line of) reasoning that lies behind these concepts of leadership is useful. This is the theme of the next section.

4.4 Logical Reasoning Underlying Leadership Conceptions

Throughout the interviews, the participants were asked whether they tended to agree or disagree with the six leadership paradigms (see the 'opinion sheet' in Appendix 'B3') as well as to explain their reasoning preferences. Table 4.3 provides an overview of these agreements and disagreements.

Table 4.3: Agreements/Disagreements with the six Paradigms



After I identified similarities and differences in the data set and reread the interviews with this table in mind, I identified two patterns: (1) agreeing with all paradigms; and 2) contrasting top-down and bottom-up leadership.

4.4.1 Agreeing With All Paradigms

As portrayed in Table 4.3, 12 out of 24 interviewees agreed with all six leadership paradigms. These interviewees mentioned, for instance, that they viewed leaders as

being heroic, powerful, and visionary, and simultaneously expressed agreement with distributing leadership and empowering subordinates. This tendency (to agree with all six paradigms) is illustrated in the following quote:

> 'Yeah, all six are important … A powerful leader is very important. A successful leader is heroic, powerful, and visionary. I think it is important, yeah. A good leader should have this to attract the people ... There is not a big difference [referring to all six paradigms]. A good leader is the one who stays behind, who leads from behind … The good leader has the ability to use people effectively; he is able to get people around and make them deliver what he wants them to deliver. He is good at exciting people, making people find value in their work so they can deliver for the company. … A good leader is able to engage and coach and influence and also emphasise why people should behave in certain ways. He should be able to tell a good story to motivate people' (Chen Xi Liu, Oil Co, HPE).

This quote began with the interviewee explicitly agreeing with all six paradigms. Subsequently, he went on to describe all the things he liked about the different paradigms. It is important to notice that the interviewee tended to focus on the positive aspects of all six paradigms, as opposed to agreeing with some more than others. A second interview quote similarly reported agreement with all six leadership paradigms:

> 'I think that number four [collective leadership] is very important … because all the team members are diverse, each one has a different personality, so not everybody is acting or behaving like you. We need to embrace differences and adjust leadership to situations, then we can turn differences into an advantage' (Nicole Li, Retail Co, HPE).

Further into the interview, the interviewee said that she was very fond of heroic leadership too. As an example of a successful heroic leader, Nicole mentioned the CEO of her company, after whom she has chosen to name her own son:

> 'A good leader, in my mind, is where everyone admires you. Everyone sees your power, which comes not just from your position, but also from your personality, your charm, and how you treat the people around you. So, the charisma of the person is critical for the leading … In our company we say we have the "Frank's Society blue blood" [name of CEO]. I agreed with this and that is why my son's name is Frank, because I work at Frank's. Today, my son knows every Frank's Society in town, and when he comes to

> Frank's Society, he is proud he is Frank, and he feels like it's his Society' (Nicole Li, Retail Co, HPE).

In this quotation, the interviewee first described agreeing with collective and contextual leadership. Subsequently, she stated agreeing with heroic leadership. In fact, she bought into the concept of heroic leadership to such an extent that she had named her own child after the founder of her company.

Consequently, the interviewees in this category combined various leadership paradigms into one conception. By adhering to all six leadership paradigms simultaneously, the interviewees reported quite a holistic view of leadership and did not seem to view any fundamental contradiction as simultaneously adhering to multiple leadership paradigms.

4.4.2 Contrasting Top-Down and Bottom-Up Leadership

Whilst the abovementioned interviewees tended to agree with all six leadership paradigms presented, another perspective was reported. When answering whether they tended to agree or disagree with the respective six leadership paradigms, the interviewees drew a distinction between the types of leadership that are strictly controlled from the top, and those that aim to empower employees to voice their opinions and challenge the status quo. These styles of leadership were referred to respectively as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'. As opposed to the tendency in the previous section, these interviewees reported a clear contrast between top-down and bottom-up types, which they viewed as fundamentally conflicting. This view is illustrated in the following quote:

> 'I myself am a true believer in situational leadership. So that's why I put number two [contextual leadership] as my highest priority. Number four [collective leadership] is somewhat similar to that. You need to have good staff, who can step up in different situations … I don't quite agree with the statement about the heroic leader … People like Steve Jobs or Jack Ma, they are chasing all the limelight. So they tend to become celebrities themselves. This is the "celebrity effect" and it seems like they are doing a good job for the company. But in reality we don't know, we don't know whatever makes the company great. Then the employees probably will think "Whatever I do – it will never be recognised for myself, it's always about the recognition of Steve Jobs or Jack

> Ma" … I tend to disagree with the statement about individual leadership too. Because, as I said, you have your natural tendencies that is your personality, but this doesn't not mean it cannot be changed, for example, during management or leadership situations at your job' (Stella Fang, Bank Co, HPE).

This quotation revealed the tendency of contrasting collective leadership approaches with heroic leadership. It first indicated the importance of empowering followers and focusing on the actions a leader can take to embrace diversity and different conditions in the environment. As a consequence, the interviewee subsequently discredited the use of heroic leadership because such a view tended to overlook potential synergies of enabling followers and instead focus on the fixed traits and charisma of the leader. Leadership was thus seen as a dynamic and social process occurring in the interplay between people, as opposed to as static features possessed by an individual. The following interview quote supported this view and highlighted the importance of the leader being able to enable followers' strengths, as opposed to focusing on the leader's own personality:

> 'I think collective leadership is important and I do believe it is more important to be democratic than directive … About the heroic leader - it is a dangerous thing. A good leader needs to have followers, needs to be inclusive, and needs to know how to enable people and use their strengths' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

Thus, by nature, this view on leadership is more selective it terms of its focus on favouring one leadership paradigm above another.

4.5 Five Conceptions of Leadership Development

In this section, I present five categories of leadership development. The categories are derived from an analysis of interviewee responses to the following questions: 'What is leadership development to you?'; 'What is leadership development in China?'; and 'What is leadership development in the West?'. The five categories were thus empirically derived and their descriptions constitute the main results of this section. In the following subsections, these categories will be described, compared, and contrasted.

4.5.1 Conception 1: Leadership Development as 'Dyadic'

In the first conception labelled 'dyadic', leadership development is described as relational, occurring between the leader and the follower. Thus, leadership development is a matter of how actors in collaboration generate clarity of direction, create or co-create alignment of mental models and efforts, and build enhanced commitment. According to this view, developing as a leader is an ongoing process that occurs on a daily basis on the job. Through interactions between leaders and followers, employees continuously learn how things are done, how decisions are made, and what targets to reach in different organisations. The direction the company is going in and the intended behaviour on the job is mainly formulated through corporate values and directions set by the management. However, subordinates are also able to contribute ideas and change the organisation through interdependent relationships. The following interview quote illustrate this view and emphasise that leadership development is perceived as occurring between the leader and follower on the job daily through interdependent relationships:

> 'The most important thing is the way of working. This is about the senior leaders and managers; how they work with you on a daily basis; how the company's system provides a platform, provides the tools to help you. I think this is the way that you can understand "Ah, the company is operating by that model". The values and the culture of the company even decide how the colleagues talk to each other, how we make decisions, how we talk about business, how we talk about targets, and also the development plans. This is the culture … I think that first we must understand each other throughout daily conversations between bosses and subordinates. Then we can become much closer to each other, and then you can influence the ways of working … Leadership development is about understanding each other's point of view; the employees can also bring some ideas, observations, to help in a situation. Maybe the company can do things differently. That is a "two-way" kind of relationship' (Jian Qiao Jiao, Toy Co, HPE).

Notably in this view, the leadership development direction is set through company values and initiatives from senior management. However, the actual implementation happens on the job daily between the followers and the leader. Moreover, it is important to stress that the follower is also able to contribute ideas and change in these interdependent relationships. A second interview quote expressed this and additionally mentioned that whilst input from the outside can be helpful, the main driver for developing leaders is on the job daily in the relationships between leaders and followers:

> ‘In terms of leadership development, there are actually very good leaders within our company. For example, we have great VPs and Senior Directors. We have a lot of experts internally. Professors from the universities can also help, but come on, they are professionals in their educational industry, but there is no way they can perfectly link with our operations and our industry. So the best way is to think about how to make sure we better use the internal resources and build strong relationships between the leaders and the subordinates for them to learn and develop as leaders on the job’ (Christine Yang, Logistics Co, HPE).

These descriptions fundamentally anticipated that the level of motivation amongst employees depends greatly on the quality of the relationship between the leader and subordinates. Consequently, the implication of this view is that leadership development initiatives must be centred on the quality of the relationship between the leader and subordinates, as well as how this is perceived, to influence alignment and commitment.

4.5.2 Conception 2: Leadership Development as ‘Team-Based’

The second category of descriptions, ‘leadership development as team-based’, portrays leadership development as an outcome of a social structure. Leadership development consequently consists of a variety of social conditions from which leadership can be enabled and emerge, thereby expanding collective efficacy. The underlying idea of these quotes relates to the internal power relationships in the teams. In this view, how teams work together, who knows what in a team, and how the existing power relationships play out within the team are essential parts of leadership development. Consequently, how employees create processes, norms, and structures that fuel mutual influence amongst actors are elements that can lead to superior direction setting, alignment of mental models, and shared commitment. The following quote exemplifies the view that leadership is developed through team dynamics and initiatives that can outweigh power differences and stimulate shared responsibility within teams:

> ‘In my team I want to encourage everybody to freely share their opinions with the team members as well as with me. When developing leaders, it is important to encourage free discussions, and acknowledge the fact that the employees have different knowledge, different backgrounds. I think it is most fair and quite important that we do not just teach employees how to be leaders, but also engage them and let them try things out in their

> teams and experience and acquire knowledge throughout all kinds of activities. They will probably learn in many cases that they do some things quite right. Sometimes they get it wrong, but they learn from the experience and that benefits the team and the entire organisation' (Jian Qiao Jiao, Toy Co, HPE).

This interviewee described that experiences with team-based learning contributed positively to leadership development. It was an important point that team members were conceived of as developing as leaders by trying out their own ideas and engaging in free discussions through different activities, as opposed to solely instructing them on what leadership is. From this point of view, failing and learning from mistakes is a natural part of the journey of developing leaders. A second interviewee supported this view and emphasised that outweighing power differences through team-based activities had been particularly useful in a Chinese context because of the interviewee's experience with high power distances in the Chinese educational system:

> 'Especially in China, you have to coach and encourage the team to develop leaders. Yeah, encourage and reinforce. In the Chinese culture, I remember when I was in primary school, or middle school, it was only when you did not behave that the teacher would call your names. So, it became like a punishment to speak up. I think in Western culture it is totally different. The teacher or the coach will encourage you and praise you whenever you say something' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

It is important to note that the impact of authoritarian Chinese education, in which teachers call on students as a way of punishing bad behaviour, here played a central role in why Chinese leaders—in their adult lives in particular—experienced problems with speaking up. A central point of this view was that team-based learning can have implications for helping leaders voice their opinions, which was found to be particularly important in China.

4.5.3 Conception 3: Leadership Development as 'Building Relationships'

In the third conception, 'leadership development as building relationships', the most important driver for developing leaders is perceived as the ability to establish personal relationships. Thus, the meaning of leadership development is associated with social networks and personal relations. The quotes that support this conception share the

common feature that developing as a leader and progressing professionally depend highly on whether or not the person in question had a good personal relationship with senior management. Thus, the possibility for promotion and increased responsibility is more conditioned upon being able to make positive connections with the right people and making a good personal impression, than on reaching KPIs and other more tangible achievements. This type of leadership development was particularly associated with Chinese business environments. In the following interview quote it is stated that the main driver for leadership development is the ability to establish various positive relationships in large networks:

> '… in Chinese organisations, being promoted is very demanding. The bosses are demanding of the subordinates, but both sides are very careful to take care of each other and especially of their bosses. That's the tradition … In many of the very typical Chinese companies, your development as a leader really relies on the network, or relationships with all the people above you' (Dorothy Jiang, Toy Co, HPE).

A crucial aspect of this quote is that in such relationships, the followers were expected to obey and take care of the leaders' needs and wishes. In addition, it was emphasised that whilst the leader is demanding, he or she is also expected to take good care of subordinates. The following interview quote supports this view and explicitly states that the acquisition of knowledge and skills is less important than the ability to engage successfully in social networks:

> '… in local Chinese banks, even if you have good sales skills, or if a person has great social skills, if the senior management doesn't like him or her, you will not see this person go further up the pipeline' (Baoyun Li, Bank Co, HPE).

The third and final quote went as far as describing these networks as a 'political game', where supporting the right people at the right time determines the employees' opportunities for professional development:

> 'In Chinese companies, no matter how talented you are, you have to listen to the seniors. Then you can be recognised. We call it a 'political game'. You know, there are political games everywhere, but it is higher in the Chinese organisations … I have a lot of classmates working in the Chinese authorities, and whenever we get together, we have a lot of things to talk about because of the different working experiences. When we gather

> together, we realise we have very different working situations and different opportunities for progression' (Dorothy Jiang, Toy Co, HPE).

Thus, a central characteristic of this category is that the nature of what constitutes leadership development is defined from a relational perspective. A consistent point of all the abovementioned quotes was that this type of leadership development was associated particularly with the practice of Chinese companies. In this view, leadership development concerns leaders acquiring social skills such as being able to develop and maintain positive personal relationships, presenting themselves correctly, exploiting the capacity of their personal network, and being likable.

4.5.4 Conception 4: Leadership Development as the 'Acquisition of , Skills, and Competencies'

In this fourth category of descriptions, certain types of content are considered the most crucial driver for leadership development. Such content is particularly direction setting, relationship building, change management, and external environment navigation. Thus, in this view, certain facts, principles, and theories are perceived to be practically useful for leaders, and consequently must be learned. To make the content 'stick' in daily practice, leadership development initiatives such as setting up role models and coaching, rotation schemes to expand network and learn from colleagues in other functional areas of the organisation, and global exposure are suggested. The following quotation concerns how to make knowledge, skills, and competencies from leadership development programmes 'stick' in daily work:

> 'Once, I attended a leadership development programme with a lot of useful knowledge. At the end of the week, we shared our key reflections and our key commitments. Afterwards, when we needed to carry these things out on a day to day basis, this reinforced our commitment and helped us to remember the training. I think there also needs to be follow-up coaching calls. After the programme I attended, I received a call from a group HR Director. He called me to follow up on how I was doing at work as well as if I could still use the things I learned from the programme in my daily work. This reminded me not to let go and keep using my skills' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

This interviewee explained how she once acquired useful knowledge at a leadership course. To ensure that knowledge was being used in daily practice afterwards, the participants made an implementation plan by the end of the course. Additionally, the interviewee received phone calls from a role model in the company who coached her on the issues she encountered when using the skills in practice. The following quote from a different interviewee highlights the benefits of rotation schemes:

> 'The benefit of rotation is that it develops strategic thinking among leaders. As leaders, we need to think broadly and holistically, instead of narrowly and only focus on day-to-day issues. In order to be a good leader, even though I am only in customer service, I need to know what sales is doing, what marketing is doing and so on—and what the company as a whole is moving towards. Here, job exposure is very important. The most direct way to learn is to work there. Then you know what they are doing. … Another way is communication. Here, you talk to the people in other functions, or you have the opportunity to join different meetings and then you understand what other people are doing. As leaders, in order to develop, we need to be exposed to situations that allow us to think outside the box, to innovate, and to make improvements and changes' (Winnie, Logistics Co, HPE).

According to this interviewee, rotation schemes were considered an effective initiative to ensure that employees acquire knowledge and skills from other functions, thereby gaining a strategic overview of the organisation as a whole. This interviewee additionally stressed that communications across functions can have a similar effect of equipping leaders with the right set of skills. Finally, a third quote from another interviewee indicated the effect of global exposure when developing leaders.

> '… learning the right functional skills and leadership skills is about global exposure. So if you want to train Chinese leaders, letting them manage foreign staff is an important thing. You can let them manage the foreign staff in a foreign culture to let them have the exposure. That might be very stretched for some of the potential leaders, but it is obviously is a good thing to do. So when they come back to China or they can be deployed to anywhere in Oil Co, I think that is ideal' (Napoleon Wang, Oil Co, HPE).

Again this quotation mentioned that being rotated into other positions helped employees gain knowledge and a strategic overview. However, whereas the previous quote focused on rotation across functions, this interviewee emphasised the competencies, knowledge, and skills that can be gained by leading employees in different cultures and other

offices. Thus, this conception focuses on how core skills, knowledge, and competencies for leadership can be connected to daily practice.

4.5.5 Conception 5: Leadership Development as 'Nationality- and Gender-Based'

The fifth and final category of descriptions portrayed leadership development as 'nationality- and gender-based'. Its main characteristic is that leadership development is focused on employees with certain characteristics. This view is distinguished from those above by targeting the leadership development of certain groups of people, mainly defined by nationality or gender. Thus, in its nature, this perception of leadership development focuses less on describing what and how a given type of content is being taught, and more on how groups of people of a certain nationality or gender benefit from initiatives. This view of leadership development tends to create a 'glass ceiling' for other groups excluded from the leadership development initiatives. This means that some employees either do not advance in their organisations or progress significantly more slowly than their colleagues, regardless of the results they deliver. The following quote describes this view of leadership development:

> 'In the local banks the opportunities for developing, as a Chinese employee, are now much, much bigger than in Western banks. I have, for example, been in the same position from when I joined the bank years ago. Also, my boss, my line manager, who is also Chinese, joined the bank in 2010, and now she is more or less in the same position, she only expanded her role a bit, but it's still with the exact same focus' (Bo Guan, Bank Co, HPE).

Here, the interviewee stated that Western companies in general provided fewer opportunities for their Chinese staff than did their Chinese competitors. This interviewee reported a feeling of being professionally stuck because of his Chinese nationality, which according to him would have been less likely to happen when working for a Chinese company. In the following quotation, another interviewee supported this view and suggested that Western workers in general got promoted significantly faster than local employees. Furthermore, this interviewee stressed that this was likely to create

leadership and communication boundaries between Western management and Chinese people working in the organisation:

> '… there's a lot of foreign faces here and we do see those people get promoted incredibly fast compared to the locals … We do not have many local senior people being promoted. I think the local people can maximum reach a Director or Senior Director role; above this it is still only Scandinavian people. It could be the case that Toy Co China creates boundaries to the management and top leaders. If they are not part of our culture, it is difficult for them to succeed in China. Even though you can speak Chinese and think you understand the culture, we still have a different way of working and a different way of showing trust in our culture' (Charles Shi, Toy Co, HPE).

Other interviewees described the same tendency but in reverse. In the following quote, a recent trend was outlined in which the Western management had invested resources particularly in developing leaders of Chinese origin:

> 'In the past in Retail Co, Chinese peoples' opportunities to develop were quite limited. After reaching VP level, we could either stay there in the same position or quit. But today, the US top management and the China CEO are already working very hard to localise and develop the China team. Now, they spend a lot of money on leadership development initiatives especially for Chinese people, not Westerners' (Xenia Li, Retail Co, HPE).

Thus, this interviewee stressed that the development of Chinese employees in her company was prioritised more highly than the development of her Western colleagues. The next quote highlighted a similar trend, not only for people of Chinese origin, but also for female leaders:

> 'Oil Co give more rights and opportunities for people to develop than SOEs do, especially for women … In 5 years' time, I think it will be possible for me to get more influence and power in terms of leadership. The new tendency is that they want to develop global talents from the Chinese market. For us, China is one of the most promising markets in the world. That's why the company wants to invest money in the people here. We have got the attention, so I do see there's big potential for us to grow here. Compared with other traditional local companies, women develop to higher levels here in Oil Co' (Qian Chen, Oil Co, HPE).

The interest in developing Chinese local leaders was explained by an increasing need for leaders who fully understood the Chinese market. Thus, it is a common feature of all the abovementioned quotes that possessing certain characteristics (i.e., nationality and gender) increased the opportunities for developing as a leader. However, in regard to what nationalities and genders were valued, the companies differed.

4.5.6 Differences of Leadership Development Conceptions

To summarise, various descriptions of leadership development were reported by the 24 interviewees. After identifying similarities in the descriptions, five categories were established. During the interviews, the participants occasionally stepped in and out of the different conceptions. The five conceptions of leadership development identified by this study were:

1. Leadership development as 'dyadic';
2. Leadership development as 'team-based';
3. Leadership development as 'building relationships';
4. Leadership development as the 'acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies'; and
5. Leadership development as 'nationality- and gender-based'.

An interesting question at this point is the nature of the differences between these conceptions. In brief, there seem to be at least two fundamental differences underlying the five conceptions. The first concerns what could be called the internal relationship between the learner and what is to be learned. A prominent feature of the first three conceptions is that they emphasise what could be called 'leadership as a social or relational process'. These three conceptions distinguish themselves from each other by suggesting three different types of social process: a professional relationship with the leader, a professional relationship with the team, and a personal relationship with the senior management. However, by their nature, all three are based on the fundamental assumption that leadership is developed through a social process, and the main accelerator for development happens through the relationships established with other employees in the organisation. By contrast, the essence of conceptions 4 and 5 seems to

lie very much in an emphasis on knowledge and personal characteristics. In conception 4, the features of leadership are external to individuals and must be acquired or possessed for them to progress professionally. Whilst the acquisition of knowledge can happen in collaboration with other people, the main focus remains on content. Finally, conception 5 distinguishes itself from the four other conceptions because it focuses on fixed characteristics. Consequently, because fixed characteristics by definition cannot be changed, assuming this view of leadership development sets high requirements for the recruitment phase because it is the only stage where such traits can be acquired by the organisation.

4.6 Evaluative Perspectives on Leadership Development Conceptions

This section moves on from identifying how leadership development is conceptualised to a more evaluative description of how the subjects feel about different types of leadership development initiatives. These descriptions were arrived at through an analysis of the answers to the following questions: 'What do you actually think effective leadership development is?'; 'What do you think good leadership development is in Chinese companies?'; and 'What do you think good leadership development is in Western companies?'. Chapter 6 will examine more deeply to what extent different approaches to developing leadership are perceived as successful by the participants, the following subsections aim to provide some more general descriptions of how good leadership development is perceived in China.

4.6.1 Positive Views on Western Leadership Development

Throughout the interviews, the descriptions of leadership development in Western companies that were positive mentioned rigorous training in leadership skills such as change management, communication, and dealing with stress. During these practices, the types of achievements required to be selected for certain programmes were clearly stated as well as what the purpose of the training was. Thus, the processes of leadership development in Western companies were described as more transparent and fairer than

those in Chinese companies. The following quote illustrates how Western companies, from this perspective, provided quality training in leadership skills from graduate level:

> '… the possibilities for leadership development are much better in Western companies. When I joined "US Oil" [an anonymised global American oil company], we had a very good training system. And this one was really good for the fresh graduates to learn about leadership skills and work issues such as how you should balance your work and life, how you should release your work stress, how you could solve people and communication problems, etc., and this really helped me. This is a very different system compared with the state-owned companies and authorities' (Dorothy Jiang, Toy Co, HPE).

It is particularly interesting to notice that people skills, communication, and stress management were prioritised more highly in Western companies than in Chinese companies. Additionally, a second interviewee emphasised that the criteria for promotion were more transparent in Western companies than in Chinese companies:

> 'I'll never go to an SOE, never … I think it's way too top-down controlled and it is not clear what results you need to achieve, or which skills you need to acquire to get promoted. There isn't really a fair competition' (Philip Zhan, Retail Co, HPE).

According to this view, Western companies tended to set clear objectives for what results the employees were required to live up to be selected for leader roles. The Chinese companies, by contrast, were considered less transparent in their leadership development pipelines, which were perceived as unfair. The third and final interviewee stressed that her Western company was better at providing leadership development initiatives, not just for Chinese employees but also for female workers:

> 'I think Oil Co is still a good company; that's why I choose to stay here. Oil Co give more rights and training opportunities for people to develop than SOEs do, especially for women. So this is an area I really appreciate' (Qian Chen, Oil Co, HPE).

Consequently, it is interesting to note that a group of interviewees suggested that Western leadership development initiatives in China are more rigorous and fair compared with their Chinese competitors. Furthermore, it was emphasised that this was true not only for Chinese employee in general but also in regards to Chinese female employees.

4.6.2 Negative Views on Western Leadership Development

In addition, negative experiences with leadership development practices in Western companies were also reported. According to these interviewees, Western companies lacked clear descriptions of how good leadership was defined. Moreover, Western leadership development initiatives were conceived of as providing worse opportunities compared with those in Chinese companies. These quotes suggested that Chinese companies, because of their comprehensive presence on the Chinese market, were able to offer significantly better opportunities for development. The following quotation mentions the tendency of Western companies failing to provide a clear definition of the type of leadership they expect from their employees in China:

> 'I don't get a consistent understanding from Retail Co about what a good leader is. We have a culture around respect and having integrity and so on, but what a good leader is from a "Retail Co perspective", I don't think we have communicated sufficiently about this, and therefore I haven't got a very good perspective on it' (Philip Zhan, Retail Co, HPE).

Notably, whilst the companies did define broad values, it was not clear to this Chinese manager what type of leadership he was expected to practice. A second interviewee stressed that the opportunities for being rotated to other positions are far superior in Chinese local banks because of their higher presence on the Chinese market:

> 'In Bank Co, we only have six branches in China. So in terms of network, the local Chinese banks often have thousands, so the opportunities for being rotated there are much bigger. In just a few years, they can give them working experience with handling different staff and different situations, etc. That's the "on-job training"; it's very useful and provides much better opportunities than we have in Western banks' (Bo Guan, Bank Co, HPE).

This quotation highlighted that some Chinese companies possess a competitive advantage in terms of the possibility of rotating employees, because of their strong presence on the Chinese market. According to this view, being rotated into different functions internally was more difficult because the Western companies had fewer offices in China to rotate employees between. A third interviewee supported this view, and

further highlighted that leadership development initiatives in Western companies during the previous 5 years had become less attractive for Chinese employees:

> 'The main reason I looked for a job in an MNC, almost 11 years ago, was that many of them had many quite fancy training programmes. But in the past 5 years, I think the MNCs have become less attractive in their leadership development among the local students. The MNCs sound nice, they look nice. The work environment is nice, but the career path and pay is not that effective compared with the good local industry companies anymore' (Charles Shi, Toy Co, HPE).

This quotation reflects a decreasing interest among Chinese leaders to take on leadership positions in Western companies. Such perspectives have implications for the acquisition and retaining of local top talents in China, because they might prefer working at companies with the best working conditions. Table 4.4 provides an overview of the positive and negative perceptions of different leadership development initiatives in Chinese and Western companies.

Table: 4.4: Overview of the Pros and Cons of Western and Chinese Leadership Development Initiatives

Leadership Development in Chinese Companies	
PROS +	**CONS -**
In recent years, Chinese companies have started to invested more in training programmes	Lack of transparency in leadership development processes
Better compensation schemes and better salaries	Lack of transpancy in promotions and leader selection
Better career paths	Less rigorous training programmes
Larger companies have more on-the-job training opportunities	Bad opportunities for professional development for female leaders
	Too top-down controlled
Leadership Development in Western Companies	
PROS +	**CONS -**
More rights and opportunities for employees to develop	Less opportunities for rotating to other positions and countries
Better at developing female leaders	Worse compensation schemes - lower pay
More rigorous training programmes and initiatives	Fewer branches/offices for rotation and on-the-job learning
Better work-life balance	Management fail to provide a consistent understanding of what type of leader they expect and require

4.7 Concepts Relevant to Leadership and Leadership Development in China

Throughout the aforementioned conceptualisations of effective leadership and leadership development, two categories arose that are related to both leadership and leadership development. These categories, showing care and the phenomenon of 'guanxi', are analysed in the following subsections.

4.7.1 Showing Care in Chinese Companies

During the interviews, consistent themes were the importance of showing care when developing leaders and enacting leadership in China. As seen in the quotations, and as will be evident as we go on, the interviewees' perceptions of how showing care is conceptualised seem to differ culturally in Western and Chinese companies. The true essence of what it means to care about employees when leading and developing leaders in China was thus perceived differently in Chinese and Western companies.

In Chinese companies, when developing leaders and enacting leadership, the interviewees reported that showing care was associated with a deeper personal relationship than in Western companies. The descriptions suggested that the definition of care in Chinese companies should be understood as a genuine, personal relationship between the boss and subordinates. Through such relationships, the boss demonstrates personal care for the employees, and the relationship plays an important part in the employees' further opportunities for career development. The interviewees frequently used the word 'family' when describing the company structure, where the boss was referred to as the father and the subordinates as children. Following this paternalistic analogy, the leader is expected to care about the employee and ensure his or her opportunities for development, both professionally and personally. This relationship between boss and subordinate is based on speaking politely and respectfully to ensure that neither the boss nor employee ever lose face or become embarrassed. However, the quotations did not suggest that Chinese leadership and leadership development do not make use of providing consequences to actions, such as praise and punishments. On the contrary, punishments such as heavy bonus cuts were commonly reported. The

following quote outlines how foreign leaders often focus on reaching KPIs, whereas Chinese leaders tend to focus on caring personally about subordinates:

> 'In the Chinese environment, I think the care-part plays a bigger role. In Oil Co, we have a lot of colleagues from Europe and the US, and they come from very strong backgrounds, the leadership programs actually originate from the West. But in our daily lives I've heard a lot of complaints. They deliver and live up to the KPIs. They keep their deadlines; that's it. That is okay. This is a business world. But in a Chinese environment, people will say, "Do you care about me personally? Do you understand my constraints?" When I cannot do the job well, maybe there are some issues behind it. In a Chinese environment, people would expect more awareness of the subordinates' emotions' (Cong Zhi Zhang, Oil Co, HPE).

A second interviewee supported this view and highlighted how Chinese leaders in general tended to listen more to their employees and take better care of them. Additionally, she stressed that the type of care practiced in Chinese companies felt like being part of a big family:

> '… Chinese leaders are more focused on the wellbeing of their employees. I think this is a good point. Chinese leaders listen more to what their staff complain about and talk about, and they show more care for their subordinates. I do think in this area Chinese leaders do better than Western leaders. They will spend time to motivate staff, to arrange some team building, and to take care of their staff. That is how they make sure the team will be just like a family … Yeah. In Chinese companies people will say, "I am treated very well. I like to work here. It's a big family for me" (Christine Yang, Logistics Co, HPE).

Finally, a third interviewee highlighted that the type of care practiced in Chinese leadership and leadership development should not be confused with the idea that Chinese organisations do not make use of punishments. On the contrary, this interviewee provided an example of heavy bonus cuts as a punishment for subordinates not performing as expected on a leadership development programme:

> 'In China there are consequences, which are very strong. If you don't perform, your salary and bonuses will be cut. For example, I tried this in a leadership development programme. I helped develop training for the operation unit, and after the training, there was a test on people skills. In this test, you were supposed to score 80% or above to be

> qualified. In this class there were more than 100 people, and six employees among the staff did not pass. What do you think the consequences were for them? Sometimes their bonuses were higher than their salaries, and the operating unit manager made the decision to cut their bonuses for at least six people for the next 6 months' (Chen Xi Liu, Oil Co, HPE).

In brief, the type of care described in these quotes was personal, genuine, and emphatic. Chinese corporate culture previously being understood as demanding, hierarchical, top-down controlled with a strong heroic leader was here described as caring, warm, and paternal. The quotations seemed to explain this combination of strict control and care with what may be defined as a 'hidden social contract'. According to the quotes, the nature of this social contract stipulated that the power granted to the boss comes with a responsibility to take particularly good care of subordinates. This responsibility was evident both on a personal level, in the daily job, and for future professional development.

4.7.2 Showing Care in Western Companies

In Western companies, a different type of care was articulated. Compared with the previous definition, the main characteristic of care in Western companies concerned the best possible support of employees in a purely professional relationship. Thus, the understanding of care was associated with being awarded trust to take on tasks and responsibilities, listen to subordinates' opinions and suggestions, and invest in leadership initiatives such as courses, workshops, and rotation schemes. In response, it is expected of subordinates that they take on company values and act accordingly to reach assigned targets. This understanding of care was demonstrated in following the quote.

> 'Some colleagues who quit Logistics Co and joined other companies have come back to me and said "Logistics Co is really a fantastic company in the way they are developing and growing people". We even get contacted by HR offering to help us build our name and our CVs. From their perspective, we do not have to stay working with Logistics Co in the future, they only just truly care that we become a better version of ourselves by offering many kinds of training and development. So, it is really a good, very systematised training programme' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

This interviewee reported that the company showed care about their employees by providing comprehensive professional support. For example, the interviewee highlighted how the company helped to tailor CVs for the employees to make them attractive for other companies on the job market. Another quotation supported this perception and further stressed that the Western company even succeeded in retaining talent while providing less generous compensation schemes, because of their heavy investments in the employees' professional development:

> '… actually, if you compare the Logistics Co work environment with the market, we probably won't be the ones providing the highest salaries, but most of our people like to stay here for many years anyway. It's just because we love the company and the way the company treats people well and invest in our professional development … We care about people, we care about our name' (Winnie, Logistics Co, HPE).

To summarise, these findings suggested that the concept of care is conceptualised differently in Chinese and Western companies. In view of the previous sections, it is particularly interesting to relate these two understandings of care to the different conceptions of leadership and leadership development. Whereas Western companies were mostly associated with bottom-up leadership structures with an interest in distributing leadership and enabling collaboration, it might seem surprising that the type of care was perceived as less personal. Similarly, it may not seem obvious that the types of care in Chinese organisations, which earlier was associated with strong heroic leaders and top-down controlled structures, were described as more caring on a personal level. This view on care, combined with the conceptions of leadership reported earlier, thereby demonstrate a higher complexity in the differences between Chinese and Western companies than just differentiating them from being either top-down or bottom-up in their fundamental views of leadership and leadership development. Various employees associated the Chinese relationship between boss and subordinate (showing care, losing face, and setting strict requirements for success) to the concept of 'guanxi'. How this phenomenon was perceived and described by the participants is further described in the next section.

4.7.3 Guanxi: The Importance of Networking in China

When conceptualising good leadership and leadership development, the majority of the interviewees naturally touched upon the concept of 'guanxi'. Guanxi's distinctive characteristic was considered to be building and maintaining personal interconnected networks for the potential future exchange of help or services. According to the interviewees, guanxi plays a particularly important role when enacting leadership and developing leaders in China. In particular, they stressed how politeness and courtesy are vital elements when navigating Chinese business environments. Moreover, terms such as 'friendship' and 'mutual trust' were used to describe the interconnected relationships of guanxi between business partners. The picture portrayed highlighted the paramount importance of any company establishing such interconnected networks to succeed in the Chinese market. Hence, guanxi was considered a vital element as part of the content of leadership development as well as an integrated part of how to enact leadership in China, internally in the companies, with clients, and during governmental relations. The following quotation highlights the importance of guanxi in being a leader and developing leaders in China:

> 'Chinese business culture has a strong focus on building networks and relationships between people. This is not an official type of promoting leaders, like in the West; it's just the natural culture, people are friends and they show politeness and courtesy to each other … This is about the 'Guanxi thing' … So even if I may not really agree with you, I would still say polite words to you, to make sure I do not offend you and things like that' (Ai Xuan Zhu, Oil Co, HPE).

This interviewee argued that because of the interest of establishing and maintaining harmonious relationships, Chinese business people would tend to be polite, show courtesy, and avoid confrontations, even in situations where they disagree. A second interview quote aligned with this view emphasises that seniority and respect within guanxi is often linked to age:

> 'The Guanxi, you know that? You can see that we don't have many young senior government officials. The senior officials are all very old. If you want to reach that position, you have to wait. This is the tradition. I think this is the thing from a Chinese understanding. This is the situation throughout the entire country' (Dorothy Jiang, Toy Co, HPE).

Additionally, the following interview quote acknowledged the existence of guanxi and emphasised that relations are often established and maintained through physical gifts, in this case a panda:

> 'Yeah, you can also see guanxi when we send a panda as a national treasure as a gift to other countries. When we have some friendships there we will send a pair of pandas to the country to show them how we appreciate the relationship. I think London has two? It's really lovely' (Philip Zhan, Retail Co, HPE).

Moreover, the following quote highlighted the concept of guanxi as being part of the mindset of Chinese employees working in Western companies. According to this view, Chinese employees were likely to project their understanding of guanxi into the behaviour of employees in Western companies too. This view highlighted that many Chinese employees would intuitively expect that Westerners will be more inclined to promote Westerners above Chinese employees, even in situations where this was not the case:

> '… a lot of Chinese people don't believe that Americans will promote them as leaders. They think, for instance, only Americans can take on the important roles in the company. Because they are Chinese, they believe in the network of socialisation … This is another side of guanxi. Chinese people will think Americans just promote Americans into the very important roles, not us Chinese, because they probably don't trust us. Deep in their hearts, the Chinese don't trust others than their own, so they think others won't trust them either. This is the psychological reasoning – even if this isn't the case … And Westerners will never know, because if you don't trust others you don't want to say bad things to them. You just want everything to be superficially good. If you trust them, you will tell them everything you want, right, everything real you hide. This is what happens to many foreigners in China' (Lucy, Retail Co, HPE).

Thus, this interviewee claimed that Chinese employees are inclined to intuitively assume that other cultures are operating under guanxi structures as well, and hence be less inclined to trust them in their decisions around leadership and leadership development. Additionally, this interviewee indicated that because of an interest amongst Chinese employees inu maintaining harmony, many Western business leaders will never know about these dynamics.

To summarise, the phenomenon of guanxi seems to be conceived as building and maintaining personal networks, which was considered of paramount importance for succeeding in the Chinese market. A central point of these quotes was that the concept of guanxi had various implications for the practices of good leadership and leadership development in China. An interesting question at this point is to what extent do Western companies choose to integrate the considerations of care and guanxi into their view on good leadership and leadership development in their Chinese operations. Moreover, it is crucial to explore to what extent the pedagogical approaches utilised for developing leaders in China are perceived as successful by participants. These questions will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I presented and analysed findings on how 24 Chinese managers conceptualised good leadership and leadership development. Thus far, this study has shown that the managers' conceptions of leadership were multifaceted. Overall, I grouped the perceptions of leadership into five different categories, conceptualising leadership as: (1) 'heroic'; (2) '360 degree'; (3) 'Western and Chinese'; (4) 'heroic with collective support'; and (5) 'powerful senior leaders and strong middle managers'. Throughout the interviews, Chinese leadership was fundamentally associated with being heroic (conception 1), whereas Western business practices were associated with 360 degree leadership (conception 2). In conceptions 3, 4, and 5, the interviewees expressed having been influenced by Chinese as well as Western leadership practices to different extents. This study indicated that the interviewees appreciated aspects of Western leadership - such as building a culture of knowledge sharing, empowerment, and spontaneous collaboration - particularly to support the senior management in not making critical mistakes. Moreover, the interviewees appreciated how coaching and transparent knowledge-sharing created friendly and constructive working environments. Chinese leadership, however, was portrayed as significantly more effective at implementing ideas and delivering results than their Western competitors. Additionally, Chinese heroic leadership was perceived as particularly successful in its relationship-building and ability to achieve targets, which according to the interviewees had a motivating effect on subordinates.

When asked whether they tended to agree or disagree with the six paradigms of leadership outlined in Chapter 2, the majority of interviewees tended to agree with all paradigms (see Table 4.3). These interviewees reported a holistic view of leadership wherein different leadership paradigms were perceived as complementary, not contradictory. Another group of interviewees reported a contrast between heroic and collective leadership styles. Thus, these interviewees drew a distinction between leadership defined by a strong leader providing direct and clear directions for subordinates and leadership as distributed amongst employees. Consequently, this category was more selective because it viewed heroic and distributed paradigms as fundamentally contrasting, not complementary.

From the data, I identified five empirically derived categories of leadership development: (1) 'dyadic'; (2) 'team-based'; (3) 'building relationships; (4) 'acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies'; and (5) 'nationality and gender-based'. The first three conceptions were by nature social processes in the sense that they viewed leadership development as a product of social interaction at work between leaders and subordinates, in teams, and in personal networks, respectively. Conceptions 4 and 5 differed in the sense that they primarily focused on fixed skill sets and attributes necessary for developing as a leader. A group of interviewees (adhering to the conceptions of leadership development as ' acquisition of skills and competencies') reported Western leadership development to provide better and more transparent opportunities for employees. Moreover, a group of interviewees (holding the conception of leadership development as 'nationality and gender-based') appreciated that particularly good opportunities existed for female leaders in Western companies. On the contrary, positive views towards Chinese companies were reported as well. These interviewees reported that Chinese companies, especially in recent years, had improved significantly in terms of developing leaders. In particular, it was indicated that leaders in Chinese companies received better exposure to global networks and top leaders than did employees in Western companies. Such quotations were consistent with the conception 'building relationships'. Finally, a group of interviewees lacked a clear understanding of what type of leadership was expected from them when working in Western companies. This view was associated with the conception labelled 'dyadic'.

Finally, two categories were raised that touched upon leadership and leadership development in China. In the first category, 'showing care', it was found that manners of expressing care through leadership and leadership development differed significantly between China and the West. Leadership and leadership development in Chinese companies were described as paternalistic, whereas the relationships between leaders and subordinates were described as deeper and more personal. Notably, Chinese leadership, which earlier was associated with strong heroic leaders and hierarchical structures, was here described as warmer and more caring. This study found that in Chinese leadership, the combination of hierarchical control and paternal care could be explained by a 'hidden social contract', in which the power granted to the leader came with the responsibility to take good care of the subordinates personally and professionally. In return, the role of subordinates was to show respect, obey, and trust in the leader. In Western companies, care was associated with providing the best possible support to employees in a purely professional relationship. Through the right leadership and leadership development initiatives, employees in Western companies were expected to take on company values and deliver KPIs in return. The second category was related to guanxi. Guanxi was considered an integral part of how leadership and leadership development were conducted internally in the companies, with clients, and during governmental relations. Moreover, it was stressed that various Chinese employees intuitively expect Westerners to be more inclined to promote other Westerners, even in situations where this was not the case. These aspects around care and guanxi were consequently considered an important part of how Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualised good leadership and leadership development.

CHAPTER 5 – Western Leadership Approaches

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents this study's empirical findings linked to Research Question 2 of this dissertation:

2. What views on leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development do foreign companies adopt when training leaders in China?

This question was investigated using descriptions from Phase I of the data collection. The participants interviewed in this chapter are treated as representatives of the five companies' official views on leadership and leadership development in China. From the seven interviews, five themes were identified:

1. Four conceptions of leadership;
2. Evaluative perspectives on leadership conceptions;
3. Logical reasoning underlying leadership conceptions;
4. Views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China; and
5. Future ambitions for training Chinese leaders.

5.2 Four Conceptions of Leadership

In this section, I present four categories of leadership derived from the interviews with seven representatives from the companies' HQs. These categories are based on an analysis of the data concerning the questions: 'What is leadership to you?'; 'What is leadership in your company?'; and 'What is "Chinese" leadership to you?'. Thus, the six categories were empirically derived. In the following subsections, these categories and their differences and similarities are presented and analysed.

5.2.1 Conception 1: Leadership as 'Harmony Searching'

In the first view, 'harmony searching', leadership is associated with reconciliatory behaviour and aimed at avoiding confrontations. This type of leader aims to establish and maintain harmony, and consequently tries to avoid delivering negative messages. Leaders in this category are fundamentally less inclined to express dissatisfaction, challenge colleagues' perspectives, and engage in conflicts. When disagreeing with colleagues, this type of leader expresses 'passive resistance'. Thus, instead of voicing potential disagreements, they will simply not act in accordance with the orders they are given. Such a leadership style can often leave top management with a lack of insights as to exactly where potential disagreements lie and what causes them. This model of leadership is consistently associated with Chinese leadership.

The following interviewee stressed that Chinese leaders tend to focus on positive things, in an attempt to maintain harmonious relationships. Moreover, this quotation emphasises that this behaviour results in 'passive resistance', through which the HQs would not be confronted with their perspectives directly:

> 'Chinese leaders will mostly focus on the positive things and try to create harmonious relationships. I have experienced more than once that they exposed me to a kind of "passive response". It is a mistake to think that just because you do not get an answer, then it means all is good. No response is not necessarily positive. Sometimes there is a "passive resistance". So you really need to make sure that you get a positive commitment and you need to reach that on all leadership levels. You rarely get confronted on your perspectives directly. This style of leadership is embedded in Chinese culture. … In terms of speaking up, they seem to be more emotionally closed, also in regard to how they feel' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

Notably, this interviewee argued that striving for harmony in professional relationships and being emotionally closed, were inherent parts of Chinese culture. Another quotation concerned the difficulties of delivering difficult messages associated with this type of leader:

> 'Often we see Chinese managers deliver orders to subordinates, but they don't follow up on them. We see a lot of managers; they don't know how to deliver difficult messages. Especially in the financial industry, we meet a lot of cases where the manager was not satisfied with the employee, but the employee himself didn't know anything until the last

> day when the manager said "Oh, I need to get rid of this person"' (Christina Zhu, Bank Co, HQs).

This quotation illustrates that this type of leadership has implications for communication and often results in subordinates not knowing whether or not the leader was satisfied with their performance before it was too late. Finally, another interviewee perceived the fear of 'losing face' as playing an important role in this category of leadership:

> '… there is this typical thing where the person in the senior role is right and must not be challenged. It is completely opposite to what you get in Western culture, where people are taught to question, argue, and discuss, and nobody thinks that's a negative. Here, there is this whole, you know, loss of face thing. You shouldn't undermine the authority of the senior person' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

In accordance with the other quotations in this category, this interviewee perceived this kind of leadership as embedded in the cultural roots of Chinese leaders. It is interesting that this type of leadership was mainly described in terms of negations. By nature, this conception mostly describes what this type of leader does not do rather than report of what they actually do when enacting leadership. It is tempting to further examine whether this slightly negatively charged conception of leadership could be interpreted just as a result of the challenges and frustrations in cross-cultural collaborations, or whether it is possible to positively articulate a type of leadership and leadership development based on these principles.

5.2.2 Conception 2: Leadership as 'Cultural Competence'

The interviewees holding this second conception reported leadership to be more or less equal to cultural competence. Thus, the meaning of leadership is to understand the cultural behaviour of subordinates and stakeholders such as clients, shareholders, and the government, and act in accordance with their cultural values and expectations. Embedded in this conception is a comprehensive understanding that the culture in which the company operates is the most important part of being a leader. This type of leadership is consistently associated with leadership in China because of the paramount importance of navigating successfully within the government's high level of control and

protectionism, as well as the requirement of establishing constructive personal and professional relationships externally and internally in the company.

The following quotation illustrates how cultural competence is an essential part of this type leadership, especially when dealing with state-owned Chinese clients:

> 'It is very important for our leaders to have a cultural understanding, because a lot of the clients here are locals. We have MNC clients like Siemens, Bosch, and Volkswagen. Here, the communication is not much of an issue, but we also have important clients who are SOEs. Yeah, I don't think a foreigner can take up a role here ... Yeah, without even knowing it, they can do something completely inappropriate. Even if you know the language, there is a lot of hidden cultural stuff that you will not be familiar with here' (Christina Zhu, Bank Co, HQs).

According to this quotation, possession of cultural competence when enacting leadership has implications for understanding a hidden cultural codex, which can determine the level of success in China. A second quotation supported this view and stressed that the development of local talent was a necessary prerequisite for succeeding in China:

> '… we believe, from a long-term perspective, that only by holding local talents we can truly understand the market, the culture, our customers, and the history, and thereby know how to build a successful business … The Chinese market has grown so fast. So only a local leadership team can help our company to have true long-term success … Especially for some particular roles, most companies need local leadership in the top positions in China. For example, for corporate affairs and government relationships it is important. Here they need local leaders who are familiar with the game rules in China … Also in human resources it is popular to select local leaders, because it goes back to China's labour law, back to China's culture, and to understand local people and all that' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

Notably, this quotation indicated that developing leaders of Chinese nationality was necessary to fully understand the cultural dynamics in the Chinese market. In particular, within certain functions acquiring local talents was considered of high importance. Finally, a third quotation similarly described the importance of cultural competence. However, as opposed to the quotation above, being of Chinese nationality was not considered a necessity for succeeding as a leader:

> '… in our organisation, we are quite inclusive, honestly. For our leaders, it's not really about them being of Chinese nationality. We still think it's more about what kind of competencies and understandings they have, and which kind of qualities we want. Our leaders can be French, for example, if they have lived in China, for example, for 10 years, and they know the language and the culture, then it's ok. We don't shut off anybody – as long as they can lead the 'Toy Co way", we need to think internationally' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

Similar to the other quotations in this category, this interviewee reported a necessity for leaders in China to be culturally competent. However, an interesting finding of this study is that whilst some quotations reported the paramount importance of acquiring leaders of Chinese nationality, to fully understand the cultural dynamics happening 'between the lines', others believed that cultural competence in China could be developed by any nationality. Thus, whilst the aforementioned three quotes represent the view that cultural competence is a vital aspect of being a leader in China, they seemed to differ in terms of their perceptions of what is exactly required to be culturally competent there.

5.2.3 Conception 3: Leadership as 'Heroic'

To achieve a more nuanced understanding of the interviewees' mental models of leadership, they were shown the 'six paradigms of leadership framework' (Appendix 'B3'). Similar to the procedure in Chapter 4, they were then asked to rank statements representing the six leadership paradigms, and with this ranking in mind, answer the question 'What is leadership to you?'. Whereas the two previous conceptions of leadership related quite specifically to leadership in China, this forced choice methodology (see Chapter 3) aimed to achieve an understanding of the interviewees' fundamental conceptualisations of leadership. The top three rankings amongst all the participants are displayed in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Headquarters' Leadership Rankings

		1) Individual Leadership	2) Contextual Leadership	3) New Leadership	4) Collective Leadership	5) Followers	6) Post-modern Leadership
Bank	Christina Zhu (Chinese)	2		1			3
Logistics	Per Hansen	1	2	3			
	Conor Walsh		1		2	3	
Oil	Marie Fan (Chinese)		3	2	1		
Toy	Lily Zhao (Chinese)		1		2	3	
	Edmund Brown	1	2	3			
Retail	Casper Wang (Chinese)	2		1	3		

1st priority
2nd priority
3rd priority

In this third conception of leadership as 'heroic', the interviewees highlighted two leadership paradigms: (1) 'new leadership' and (2) 'individual leadership'. In this view, leadership is associated with heroic behaviour and certain individual traits such as being visionary, confident, energetic, and dominant (see Chapter 3). The main task of a leader is to drive a vision and create a shared dream for the employees, for the company, and for society. Moreover, a leader must inspire employees to deliver 'beyond contract'. This paints a picture of an approach to leadership that is reproductive in the sense that its purpose is to encourage subordinates to reproduce the leader's ideas further into the organisation. The relationship between leader and follower can thus be understood as

relatively obedient with a fundamental expectation of the subordinates to take on the leader's ideas and strategic views. The following quotation outlines the importance of heroic leadership:

> 'A leader means somebody who can build a vision and be a true inspiration. There are a few key words. The first is that he can draw a vision. He can create a dream for the team and everybody lives for this dream. If you can only engage people by money or short nonsense, this is not a true leader. A true leader is about whether you can set up a vision and benefits for us as human beings, for the society, for the country, or for the business. Have a big dream. First, a leader can draw the dream. Second, he can inspire people to believe in the dream and make them want to work hard to achieve it. Make people trust you and be willing to follow you. This inspiration is very important for a leader. I think that's all a definition for myself and for the Retail Co culture too' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

This quotation highlighted how leadership was perceived as formulating a vision and inspiring followers to buy in on certain ideas. Thus, this perception of leadership is fundamentally hierarchical and controlled from the top down. Moreover, a central point of this view is that the power of the leader comes with the responsibility for acting ethically towards individual subordinates, the company, and the country. Another quotation described heroic leadership as 'the moment of truth', which refers to standing up and taking the lead for what the employee believes in:

> '… there is a little piece of heroic leadership in us all. That thing is the essence of what I mean by 'moments of truth', where you have the chance to actually act in a way that takes a little courage to stand up and speak your voice of what you believe in. Courage is one of the words I would add in there as well. So I need to go with that one about heroic leadership and individual traits. These are some interesting ones, because I do believe, and this one I would say, you don't just take leadership, you're given it. So I do believe in this heroic part' (Edmund Brown, Toy Co, HQs).

As with the previous quotation, this interviewee highlighted that leadership is given by subordinates, which entails a responsibility, not just in terms of results but ethically too. Interestingly, whereas heroic leadership in the previous chapter was mainly associated with Chinese leadership, the quotations in this chapter perceived heroic leadership as universally effective across different counties and cultures.

5.2.4 Conception 4: Leadership as 'Collaborative and Contextual'

In the fourth and final view, the interviewees defined leadership with reference to the collaborative and contextual leadership paradigms (see Table 5.1). In contrast to the conception above, the meaning of leadership is here mainly associated with developing proactive employees and innovative teams. The role of the leader is to empower subordinates and colleagues to help identify risks, and through constructive teamwork processes frame solutions collaboratively. Such a view on leadership embraces diversity of groups in terms of culture, nationality, and gender. The following quotation highlights why this style of leadership was required in the company:

> 'We are a network business … So, we need people who are very smart, who are capable of understanding strategy and strategy choices, and if asked can give input to that, but their main function is actually to execute. … So the leaders we are trying to develop are ones who can recruit and build strong teams, who can deliver across geography, across functions, in a situation where they may not have complete control. … We're trying to find that optimal mix, where the leaders on the ground can see the opportunity, they can see the risk, and they can also frame suggestions and solutions to address those opportunities and risks at the right times. What we need them to do is to be able to put that convincingly to our head office, but without necessarily with the authority to say "We are going to do this now" … We need people who are prepared to be team players and say "Yeah, I think this could work, but I understand we have got to do this collaboratively"' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

This interviewee pointed out that leadership in his company was about enabling smart people in the organisation and letting them develop ideas and solutions autonomously, and then presenting these to colleagues and senior management when required. The nature of leadership was thus conceived of as an interdependent relationship where boss and subordinates inspire each other and develop visions and solutions in collaboration. These processes happened across functions and country offices wherein senior management was not always in complete control. Another quotation similarly described how this conception of leadership corresponded with her company's values:

> 'Collaboration is something we want to embrace; this is one of the most beautiful things to me in daily life in this company … Also, leaders must be iconic in their styles, find their own leadership styles, but this is very much related to the situation. However, not many Chinese people in our company have had the opportunity to deal with employees

> of different nationalities. So that makes Chinese leaders quite different, because if you, for example, are working in the US, it is very common to have people from all over the world in your team. Then you learn about cultural differences, religious differences, and by default you will learn to demonstrate how to be the best leader in different situations' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

In accordance with the previous quotation, this interviewee described collaboration and contextual leadership as prominent parts of the company's leadership model. In this manner, the leader provided room for subordinates to collaborate and challenge the 'status quo' and question the leader's visions, strategic goals, and solutions. However, the nature of leadership was contextual too in the sense that some strategic tasks and targets were relatively fixed, whereas other tasks and targets were open for various solutions and interpretations and encouraging innovative thinking. Notably, the second interviewee expressed that Chinese leaders were usually behind their Western colleagues when having to navigate within this leadership style, because of their lack of global exposure.

5.2.5 Comparing Conceptions

To summarise the empirical part of this study thus far, various perceptions of leadership were reported. In this chapter, I identified common points between these views and grouped them into categories. As with the previous chapter, it was clear that during the interviews the interviewees occasionally stepped in and out of different views, and thus could adhere to multiple conceptions. After interviewing 7 participants, the following four conceptions of leadership were identified:

1. Leadership as 'harmony searching';
2. Leadership as 'cultural competence';
3. Leadership as 'heroic'; and
4. Leadership as 'collaborative and contextual'.

A natural question at this point concerns the nature of the differences between these conceptions. In brief, there appears to be at least one fundamental difference underlying

the four conceptions. Whereas conceptions 1 and 2 tend to describe the kind of leadership observed or preferred in China, conceptions 3 and 4 relate to the companies' more fundamental views on leadership. In general, the descriptions from conception 1 highlight the types of behaviour that have been observed in China, and conception 2 emphasises a type of leadership considered necessary for succeeding in the Chinese market. By contrast, the views that constitute conception 3 concern characteristics of a leader in general, and conception 4 addresses a type of leadership that is formulated in relation to the interviewees' respective companies' values and practices. Thus, the four conceptions seem to represent: (1) the current leadership that Chinese employees enact; (2) vital leadership skills to have in China; (3) what constitutes a leader in general; and (4) what constitutes a leader in the employees' companies.

5.3 Evaluative Perspectives on Leadership Conceptions

Whilst the previous section presented a conceptual framework for how leadership was conceived of by the seven participants, I now move on to present and analyse more evaluative views. The procedure through which these descriptions were arrived is an analysis of the answers to the questions: 'What are the pros and cons to Chinese leadership?' and 'In what ways are Chinese leaders behaving better/worse than leaders in other country offices?'. The present section moves on from elucidating what the interviewees think leadership is to what they believe effective leadership is in China versus the West.

5.3.1 Positive Views on Chinese leadership

During the interviews, the participants reported different evaluative descriptions of the leadership they experienced in China. The positive views emphasised that Chinese leaders possessed a particularly strong inclination for learning. In these quotes, it was highlighted that Chinese employees on average demonstrated higher motivation and better discipline than leaders in other countries. Moreover, Chinese leaders were generally perceived to express a stronger feeling of attachment to the company than their colleagues in other country offices.

The following quotation indicates that Chinese leaders possess a strong inclination for learning and improving professionally:

> 'Here in China, I think we have a stronger natural inclination amongst people for learning and developing. People here really want to improve, they want to learn new skills and they want to improve their leadership capabilities. It's not to say you don't find people like that back in Europe, or America, or elsewhere – you do. But I think it is a particularly well-defined trait amongst Chinese, they want to do this. So I think, first of all, there is a desire to actually learn and improve. That's actually both in terms of progression in their career and in the general capabilities and skills that they get' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

Interestingly, this interviewee pointed out that the high interest in learning and development amongst Chinese leaders was not just perceived as an interest in being promoted but as a genuine interest in developing capabilities and skills from the company. Another quotation emphasised the dedication amongst Chinese leaders:

> 'Maybe the Chinese leaders have a better kind of discipline; they are performing for the family, they are performing for the company as a family' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

An interesting finding is that the Chinese leaders, in this view, seemed to distinguish themselves from leaders in other country offices by expressing a stronger feeling of attachment, described almost as a family affiliation for the company.

5.3.2 Negative Views on Chinese leadership

By contrast, several quotations painted a more negative picture. In this view, Chinese leaders' tendency to avoid engaging in conflicts was perceived as a lack of capacity for solving problems. These interviewees argued that instead of solving problems, this behaviour just moved problems around internally within the organisation. Moreover, these quotes suggested that less confrontational leadership behaviour caused difficulties for Chinese leaders in occupying strategic roles in the top management of companies. Additionally, it was stressed that not setting consequences for low achieving leaders was

perceived as unfair to high-achievers who made an effort to deliver results. In this view, the attempt to treat subordinates equally was not the same as treating them fairly. Finally, the HQs reported a lack of global strategic overview amongst Chinese leaders because of the short history of modern Chinese businesses.

The following quotation reports the cons of Chinese leaders attempting to avoid engaging in conflicts:

> 'A bad thing about Chinese leaders is that they always avoid problems. Once HR gets involved, we talk to the employee, and the employee says that "The manager has never told me this before". So the delivery of negative messages is a challenge for Chinese managers, because Chinese people always want to be the "good guy". In this way, they push HR into being the bad guy in the communication and they are not responsible for their own employees. … the managers need to be the bad guy sometimes. I think being fair is very important, but what does being fair really mean? It doesn't mean that if I have a jar of water, and I give everyone the same, then it's fair. You need to distinguish between different performances and then reward them properly. But often, the Chinese managers here don't know how to do that … For some teams, everyone gets the same. So, in terms of resource allocation, if you did most of the work but you weren't rewarded properly, then people will not feel happy … So it is an issue, how to deliver difficult messages, they don't know how to do that' (Christina Zhu, Bank Co, HQs).

An interesting point here is that Chinese leaders, in an attempt to be nice and friendly, were perceived as bad leaders by Western HQs. Instead of confronting subordinates with unsatisfactory behaviour, the Chinese leaders chose to treat everyone equally to avoid socially harmful confrontations; however, in this context, such leadership behaviour was perceived as weak and unfair. The following quotation supports this view; the interviewee stated that Chinese leaders were not considered capable of taking on top leadership positions because of their lack of confrontational leadership abilities:

> 'I think that from our perspective, Chinese leaders generally are struggling to take on top positions in global companies. It is especially a problem for them to take on strategic roles because they don't have these confrontational leadership abilities that are needed for such kinds of roles' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

Finally, the following interviewee reported that Chinese leaders had difficulty taking on strategic positions because of their lack of exposure to doing business globally:

> '… China has a very special and unique history and culture. The Chinese history of multinational business is not very long. I believe it only really took off around twenty-something years ago. Starting from Deng Xiao Ping's age … In most international companies, the leaders must have global insight. They need to have a global view and the ability to create a strategy and make it happen, and this is very difficult for Chinese leaders, because of our short history of doing business in modern times. Most of the leaders here have only worked, even lived and studied, in China. Yet, we have some good young talents, they are our new hope. But they are still very young … to get Chinese CEOs in place is very difficult' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

It is a thought-provoking finding that the Chinese history of doing business globally is considered young. Moreover, it is interesting to further explore cultural explanations and motivations that may exist for why Chinese leaders are perceived as not wanting to engage in conflicts. This will be examined further in Chapter 7. Table 5.2 displays an overview of the pros and cons of the different styles of leadership.

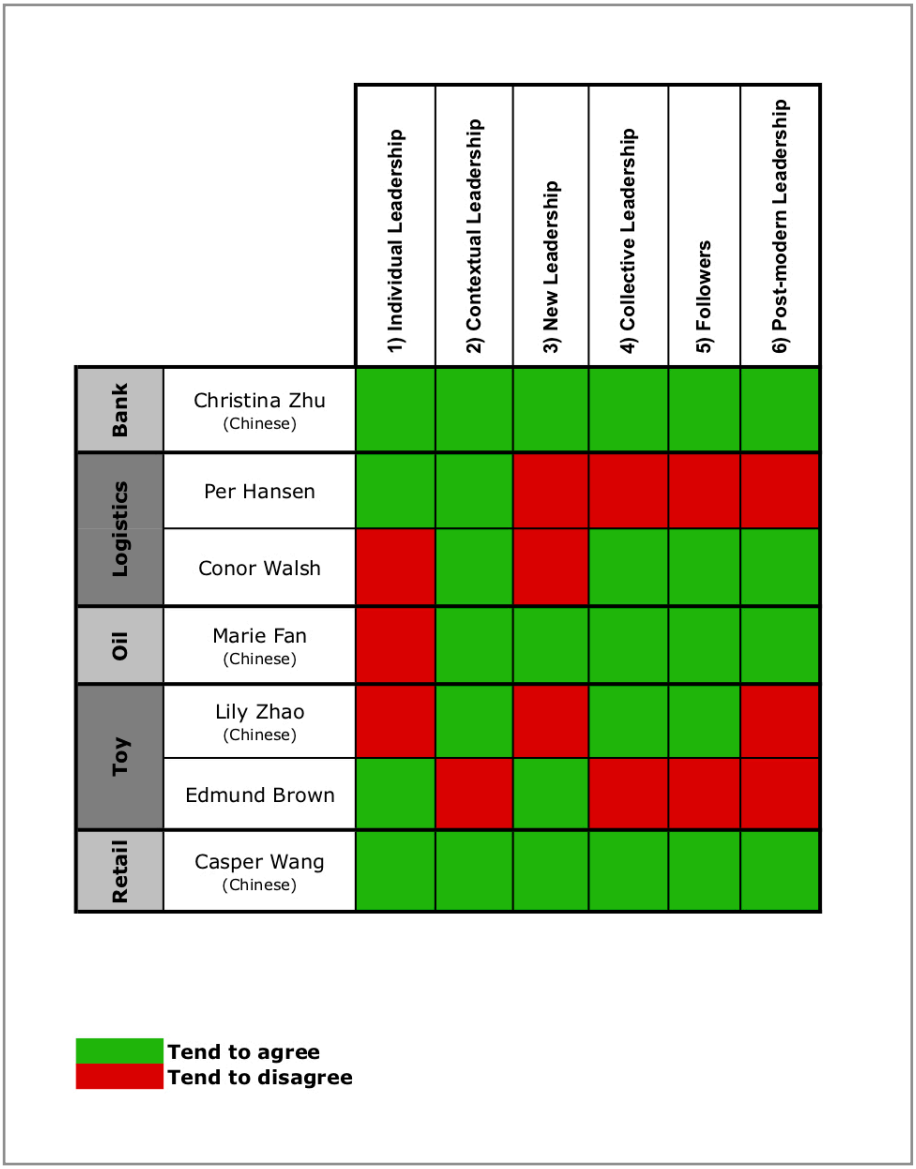
Table 5.2: Headquarters' View on Chinese Leadership

PROS +	CONS -
Strong natural inclination for learning and developing	A lack of ability to confront colleagues results in important problems not being solved
Higher motivation amongst leaders, than in other parts of the world	Less capable of taking on strategic roles, due to a lack of confrontational leadership abilities
Better discipline leaders in other countries	Rewarding subordinates equally, not matter performance, which is unfair.
Strong feeling of attachment to the company	Lack of global insights and overview, due to short modern business history

5.4 Logical Reasoning Underlying Leadership Conceptions

During the interviews, the participants were asked whether they tended to agree or disagree with the six leadership paradigms (see the "opinion sheet" in Appendix 'B3') as well as to explain their reasoning preferences. Table 5.3 provides an overview of these agreements and disagreements.

Table 5.3: HQs' Agreements/Disagreements with the six Leadership Paradigms



After identifying similarities and differences in the data set and rereading the interviews with this table in mind, I identified two different patterns: (1) agreeing with all paradigms; and (2) contrasting top-down and bottom-up leadership.

5.4.1 Agreeing With All Paradigms

As displayed in Table 5.3, two out of seven interviewees reported agreeing with all six paradigms. During the interviews, these interviewees went through each paradigm and

systematically explained the benefits to every type of leadership. This tendency of agreeing with all six paradigms is illustrated by the following quotation:

> 'Actually, personally I like all these six statements … So, the first one is about individual traits; it is not a group of people. This relates to the CEO, or such a kind of big boss. It is about what kind of people you want to follow you. If we talk about Frank, for example [CEO of the company]. The CEO's influence on an organisation is huge. The culture is the "boss culture", so for me the individual, as a human being, his personality, his spirit and energy will be fundamentally important. That is why I think being visionary, and those people who can inspire and motivate others are so important. So this paradigm three and one, I think it's the foundation when we talk about leadership. However, many multinational companies are huge organisations. Then a leader must be able to organise and establish some form of democracy. Then you need to build strong teams, and encourage them to enable their own autonomy, and to be accountable for their results. That's why it's a collective process … And number five is the same, it's about how to build a followership … and number six, if the leader is not aligned with his team, such kinds of celebrity bosses can be very dangerous' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

By tending to agree with all six leadership paradigms, this view is holistic in its nature. Thus, the six paradigms were perceived as complementary in their nature, and all together constituted the behaviour of a good leader. Notably, the two interviewees holding this view both declared that this was an expression of their own personal views. For example, in the abovementioned description, the company tended to favour a heroic leadership style (new leadership); however, it was less clear whether the company also favoured, for instance, collective and post-modern leadership, or whether this was an expression of the interviewee's own personal opinion. Moreover, in light of the previous chapter, it is interesting to note that the two employees reporting this view were Chinese. To what extent this reasoning is particularly compatible with Chinese leadership philosophy is further discussed in Chapter 7.

5.4.2 Contrasting Top-Down and Bottom-Up Leadership

The abovementioned interviewees tended to agree with all six leadership paradigms, but a second tendency was also reported. Five out of seven interviewees reported contrasting

views on heroic and individual leadership, and collective and contextual leadership styles. The interviewees thus drew a distinction between the types of leadership controlled from the top and bottom in an organisation and the ones that aim to empower employees to voice their opinions and encourage them to challenge the 'status quo'. Opposed to the previous section, these interviewees reported a clear contrast between what was described as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' methods of enacting leadership, which they viewed as fundamentally conflicting. The following quotation describes this tendency:

> 'We truly believe in top-down leadership and in showing the way to go. So number five (followership) is in strong disagreement, not as much as six though … this is because we expect that the leader sets the direction. Number three about heroic leadership is what we used to be like back in the days. Here we had a very militant version of leadership. But this thing about strong power demonstrations turned out to be too strong, so now we believe in a combination of one (individual leadership) and two (contextual leadership) … our leaders are consistently role models and represent the company values, which requires that they can read different situations and consistently represent the company way of leading. We are not a democracy, so it is not a collective process as such, and we don't believe in these very much bottom-up styles of leading' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

This quotation illustrated how the company Logistics Co clearly preferred a top-down approach to leadership, meaning that the leader sets the direction and acts as a role model for subordinates. As a natural consequence, the interviewee reported disagreeing with the more bottom-up oriented styles of leadership such as 'followership' and 'collective'. Consequently, this line of reasoning is more selective than the previous conception. Thus, in this view, the participants to a higher extent tended to view their choice of leadership as an 'either or choice'. An interesting observation is that these interviewees, as opposed to the previous conception, presented their views as a representation of the official (Western) company view on leadership.

5.5 Views on Pedagogical Approaches to Leadership Development in China

In this section, I describe six categories of leadership development. The categories were derived from an analysis of responses to the following questions: 'What is leadership development to you?'; 'What is leadership development in China?'; 'What is leadership development in the West?'; and 'What view do you take on leadership development when developing leaders in China?' The six categories were thus empirically derived and their descriptions constitute the main results of this section. In the following subsection, these categories will be described, compared, and contrasted.

5.5.1 Conception 1: Leadership Development as 'Embedded in the Corporate Culture'

The main feature of the first view is that it portrays leadership development as primarily occurring in daily work, guided by the company culture. Whilst the companies do provide short introductory workshops with formal leadership training, the most important accelerator for leadership is daily work. In this model, senior management define visions and values and acts in accordance with then. Subsequently, once employees start copying this behaviour, values and practices are naturally spread throughout the organisation. To ensure that vision and values are guided throughout the organisation, the companies make use of role modelling to inspire, show the way, and exemplify good behaviour. For the same reason, this view also favours the '70/20/10 principle', meaning that 70% of employees' leadership development happens on the job, 20% happens by engaging with other people, and 10% happens by reading articles and books.

The following quote describes leadership development as happening on the job through highly centralised and top-down controlled processes:

> 'Toy Co is quite unique in terms of its own culture and values and they put a lot of effort into building a very centralised, top-down leadership model. It's rooted from the top to the ground … The thinking is, if all the leaders think and behave the same way, then it gradually will impact the lower levels to ensure the whole company talks and behaves in

> the same way, even if you don't invest in their daily life ... So the investment in leadership development is straight from the top. … then you will ensure that pyramid-wise, the ground roles will also follow … There's an opening workshop to gather all people by our standards. This training material design there could be video, PPT, different training tools, and also we'll have dialogues, role-plays etc. … But the most effective leadership development is not about textbooks, it's all about internalisation' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

This view has implications for what levels of the organisation's leadership training is directed towards. In this view, formal training is primarily directed towards top leaders. Because the top leaders in this organisation were mostly Westerners, it relied on Chinese leaders to develop through mainly social processes on the job. The next quotation supports this view; the interviewee described how the Western HR Partner would personally spend time coaching the Chinese leaders the level below him:

> '… I sit with them, I do a lot of coaching with the Chinese leaders, I have hired these people so they got a lot of trust with me. And they do say that they appreciate the openness that we have. So they like it, but they don't do the same … Therefore we started working with what we call "role models" where we look for good behaviour' (Conor Walsh, Toy Co, HQs).

In this quotation t is described how the interaction between boss and subordinate was considered essential for the development of leaders. It is interesting that this employee mentioned that Chinese employees appreciated the openness, yet for some reason chose not to copy his behaviour. The next quotation described a similar type of leadership development happening mainly on the job. However, as opposed to the two quotations above, this approach was less hierarchical:

> 'Essentially, we be believe that leaders develop best through trying things out by themselves. We adhere to the principle called "70/20/10". This means that 70% of learning comes by doing things by yourself; 20% comes by engaging with others in dialogue and collaboration; and the final 10% comes from reading articles, participating on courses … We don't believe that just by reading alone, or by participating in a course or workshop that you can become a skilful leader. Here you need practical experience and real-life feedback … Back in the days, we had quite an extreme version called "sink or swim". This was where we pushed employees out on deep waters, and a few years later, we could see whether they were able to swim. However, it's not exactly like that

> anymore, but we are strong believers in the value of practical experience. This is why our employees will not be assigned to a leadership development programme before they have been promoted to a leader position. In China, however, it often puts us in a catch 22 situation, because if we do not promote them into leadership positions then they won't get on the leadership development programmes, and then they can't become leaders and so on' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

This quotation emphasised the importance of employees trying out different ways of leading by themselves, with short training initiatives scaffolding the process. However, the interviewee perceived a fundamental problem in this structure that causes problems in China. By not offering formal training initiatives until after the leaders have been promoted, the lack of promotion of Chinese leaders resulted in a catch 22 situation, and prevented the local talents from reaching the next level of their development. Finally, in another quotation, an interviewee reported the need for establishing more local Chinese leaders as role models:

> 'We haven't set up any good role models to show how a Chinese talent can be successful in a global environment. We do not see many successful stories or cases in the market, not just in Retail Co, but also in many other multinational companies. So I don't think people's confidence is high. So how do we build people's confidence? I think we need to show a role model; we need to show a good story, a true story, of how we Chinese people can grow from Retail Co. Then some day the local Chinese can be the leaders of other countries, they can be the leaders of small businesses in India or even Japan, or maybe big business in the UK or Canada. If someday we can have such a kind of story, a true role model, it will be totally different. If you ask for the Chinese leaders' inspiration, I don't think many people will tell you "I will be the next global leader in the future" ... For example, we could identify one or two real high-potential talents on the executive level, and we could set up a global example for China talents. Can we do that?' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

From this perspective, a central point is that the lack of local role models caused difficulties for the company in developing and maintaining talent in China.

To conclude, whilst all the quotations above mainly perceived leadership development in China as happening on the job, these quotations contained differences in preferences of top-down and bottom-up approaches to leadership. To what extent these different

approaches were perceived as successful by the Chinese participants is further explored in the following chapter.

5.5.2 Conception 2: Leadership Development as 'Programme and Workshop-Based'

The second view refers to leadership development as more or less equal to programmes and workshops. Thus, the meaning of leadership development is to expose employees to certain programmes or workshops and subsequently encourage them to apply this knowledge in their daily work. As opposed to the previous conception, leadership development is perceived as coming from an external source, such as a teacher, book, or learning activity. Thus, the quotations presented in this category are descriptions of leadership workshops and programmes and the ideas behind them.

The following quotation indicated how a leadership development programme was especially designed with the aim of equipping 20 Chinese high-potential leaders to take on top leader roles:

> 'So, initially we had this sort of competence structure, where we had three modules of classroom-based teaching, which was led by HKUST, sandwiched around working on projects in teams. In our initial batch, we identified 20 Chinese high-potential talents. Then we identified four real business problems that we wanted to address and study. By using our best talents we got a sort of "win-win-win". So we went to the business and we produced a growth list of potential topics. They typically needed to be projects that could be addressable within a 5 to 6 month period, which was the time frame that we had for the overall programme. We started off with a module of classroom training, with more theoretical academic stuff at the start. Then we got them working on projects. And then midway through the projects, we had another session of classroom learning where we talked about communication and report writing, how to present findings, how to elevate from your research and analysis, key themes and messages, and how to put them over convincingly and effectively. Then they went back and did some further work on their projects to finish them off, and then we had a third module with classroom training where they were very intensively coached on presenting the project findings. Finally, in the end of the third module, they actually presented the outcomes of their projects towards what I call a "Star Chamber" of Senior Managers, in Scandinavia, in our head

> office. And on the last day, we brought in senior managers from across the group, most of whom they hadn't met before, and each team then had to present their projects and recommendations … At least two of the projects have actually gone into implementation subsequently. At the end of it all, we had a graduation' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

This quotation portrayed a special attention towards developing Chinese leaders. The interviewee carried the belief that this was best achieved by a development approach targeting high-potential leaders in homogeneous groups consisting only of Chinese leaders. A remarkable aspect of this approach is that it is classroom-based and addresses real company problems. Moreover, the interviewee highlighted the establishment of a 'Star Chamber' consisting of Western senior leaders to whom the participants received the chance to present their ideas to real business problems. This exercise aimed to address Chinese leaders' abilities to present ideas, and simultaneously directly benefit the business. The next quotation similarly describes how teaching sessions on coaching were conducted in Oil Co:

> 'So, actually, for all these leadership development programmes, we train them in coaching. It is not just a "one-time event". Each leadership programme is about one and a half years to two years long. So it is really a "leadership journey", as we like to call it. It consists of several phases. The first phase is mainly about self-reflection, which is the pre-work. Then we have face-to-face teaching sessions. And in between the face-to-face sessions, there is "on the job" learning. Coaching comes all the way up from the Managing Director. It goes on all levels of the company, from first line level to the top leaders. And it is becoming more and more important' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

An interesting implication of this approach is that the teaching was not just perceived as a single event but as consistently ongoing over years. Another interesting aspect of this quotation is that the cycle of the programme firstly addressed the individual through self-reflection sessions, secondly through face-to-face training, and finally applying the skill (coaching) as an integrated part of the company culture through on-the-job learning initiatives. Thus, this view opened up to the idea of perceiving leadership development programmes as completely separated from on-the-job learning initiatives. Finally, another interviewee described training programmes with the purpose of making employees collaborate across different functions:

> ‘Where I think we got the most benefit was actually teaching sessions where we had them [the Chinese managers] working on projects in teams in a classroom. The fact that they were having to do this in addition to their day jobs, and they were having to manage complexity, they had a busy day-to-day job to do and in their spare time we were asking them to tackle quite complicated business problems maybe in an area outside of their expertise, working with people they didn’t functionally report to. So they were a group of peers, they had to figure out how to get along, what skills they had, how to tackle projects and really take the responsibility for making a project plan and driving it through to a conclusion. That was a really solid learning experience for all of our people. A lot of them were really stressed by it, and a lot of them were really stretched by it. I think that was extremely valuable’ (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

This quotation emphasised the value of exposing the Chinese leaders to colleagues in other functional units of the company. Thus, this approach aimed to encourage stronger ties and spontaneous knowledge sharing across the organisation. As with the two other quotations, this interviewee described a focus on solving real business problems on the courses. Thus, in the best case, the courses would benefit not just the individual development of the participants but also the companies’ strategic units in terms of the specific problems and challenges they were facing.

5.5.3 Conception 3: Leadership Development as ‘Aligning to Global Values’

The third view perceived the nature of leadership development as being conducted similarly in different offices worldwide. Leadership development is thus no longer conceived of as an activity, which must be adjusted to different contexts, but more or less as a fixed set of values to be applied throughout the entire organisation. Whilst the aforementioned conception suggested that cultural adjustments were key when developing leaders in China, this set of descriptions insisted on not customising leadership development initiatives in China. Thus, the process of learning is viewed as a one-way direction of learning, with HQs informing country offices regarding acceptable leadership behaviour.

The following quotation describes how leadership development is conceived of as one global approach:

> ‘As I said, this is a global company so everything we do is global, so we are quite cautious that we don't customise. We don't want to see different leadership models and different interventions in different places. Everything should be starting from the top-level group, no matter if it is our product, our innovation, or our leadership development approach. This is the essence of the company, so we don't want to see variety … The Toy Co brand has been rooted already through many generations, but recently the leadership development focus is more towards ensuring our current leaders can embrace our globalisation journey ahead, which means we are rooted from Scandinavian values and approaches … We want to demonstrate the same capability all over the world, give consumers the same quality of service product … We don’t really think it’s a Chinese context or another context, because this is a really truly global company, honestly’ (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

Thus, leadership development was thought of as a globally universal process through which identical company values and leadership initiatives were adopted in all offices. This view was chosen with the aim of establishing equally strong leaders and company values all throughout the organisation. The next quotation similarly emphasises a universal pedagogical approach to leadership globally:

> ‘We are not nurturing Chinese leaders, we want to ensure we have “Toy Co leaders”. If we have someone who can speak the same language [Chinese], complete similar tasks, we do not differentiate them by their nationality. If you customise your leadership development approach, then it means that you will provide some employees with special offers, and make them different to others. That is not fair from our perspective. So the best way is to make sure they are the same as others and don't customise, but let them know more about what the entire group expects from them. Through that approach, we will be able to ensure everybody is equipped similarly’ (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

Thus, leadership development was referred to as a standardised global activity. The previous conceptions viewed standardised leadership development initiatives as being unfair for Chinese people because cultural differences meant they were considered less inclined to advance. Consequently, it is interesting that this view considered it unfair to customise leadership development initiatives because they were perceived as unfair to non-Chinese employees in the organisation.

5.5.4 Conception 4: Leadership Development as 'A Customised Approach'

In this view, the main characteristic of leadership development is an element of cultural awareness. Thus, being aware of differences in culture, fundamental assumptions, and ways of enacting leadership are considered crucial components for leadership development in China. Moreover, these quotations indicate a need for developing local Chinese leaders because of cultural differences in handling local clients and governmental relations on the Chinese market. These interviewees consistently reported that Chinese leaders in the past progressed significantly slower than did their Western colleagues when participating in standardised global leadership development programmes. Consequently, a need for customising leadership development initiatives to accommodate their needs sufficiently was described.

The following quotation indicates a change in the talent development strategy in China because of an increasing need for Chinese leaders:

> 'During the last 10 years, there has been a change in our talent strategy. Ten years ago, our company grew rapidly as an organisation as well as through acquisitions. The vacuum of leadership, which arises when such a rapid growth kicks in, was to a high extent filled out by expatriates. So our Western leaders were sent out to China, and other places in the world, as leaders and ambassadors for our Western culture and values, which worked well and quickly in the short-term. During the past 10 years, however, the model of just copying and pasting the business culture globally has been put under great pressure. We observed the Chinese economy growing rapidly, becoming a dominating global player. In this way, we have been forced to meet the customers differently. We can't just send out a Scandinavian businessman to negotiate and do business with a 70-year old Chinese businessman. We need a higher diversity of our workforce to increase our innovation capacity. By having a more diverse group of employees, we encounter and tackle these challenges better. We simply can't survive solely with blue-eyed blond Scandinavian men' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

This interviewee argued that the development in the Chinese market had left their company with no other option than to customise their leadership development. Thus, it was fundamentally viewed as a necessity to embrace diversity and adopt different cultural approaches to leadership to remain competitive. The next quotation describes

the same point of view; however, despite this opinion, the company's strategy for leadership development in China was moving in an opposite direction:

> 'So, for the past 5 years we have had local leadership programmes. The reason is that the Chinese business in Bank Co is localised and we've got our own legal entity here. From 2011, we had a sizeable team locally in China, and we had talents at junior and middle level. But they somehow had a gap in their leadership competencies compared to, for example, our counterparts in Singapore and Hong Kong. These are more developed countries. So although we offered our employees VP or Director level positions, here in China, there was a gap … Yeah, this was mainly in regards to a capacity in people management, or as leader. This was why we came up with the idea to make a 5-year localised leadership programme to train them … we actually did a survey this year to review the programme. This revealed that among the participants, compared to their peers, the performance rating is much higher. However, this programme was totally different from the training programmes at global level, and from this year we've been asked to stop all the local customised training programmes because the management want to streamline our leadership development approach. They want to centralise all the training stuff from a global level. … So we are not allowed to run any local programmes anymore starting from this year. Maybe from a cost or resources perspective it makes sense, but we don't think it's good for China' (Christina Zhu, Bank Co, HQs).

Notably, this interviewee reported that despite the tangible success of the customised leadership development initiative in China in the past, the global management had chosen to close them down. This was done with the intention of streamlining the organisation's leadership pipeline globally (as described in conception 3). However, as this quotation illustrated, this caused great disappointment and frustration amongst the employees in the Chinese HR unit.

The following quotation describes how certain Western leadership initiatives needed localised methods for implementation to work in a Chinese context:

> 'To be honest, as a Chinese national, I think that this coaching culture is not a part of Chinese culture. We introduced this philosophy and this methodology from the West and we tried to promote it in Oil Co, China. My personal observation is that some leaders, they did not really understand what coaching meant. For example, I facilitated an important workshop with our senior leaders here. After the workshop, I spoke to one

> of the leaders, who had been working with Oil Co for more than 20 years, and when I asked him what his key learning was that he could take away from today's workshop. He mentioned that this was coaching. Because in past years he was told many times that he had to coach his employees, but on that day he just realised that his understanding of coaching was totally wrong because he thought coaching meant teaching. Many leaders here have technical backgrounds, so most of them are very strong technically, but coaching is not part of their expertise, especially for Chinese nationals. They often have the feeling, why did we do this? It really takes time to make them realise the benefits' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

This quotation indicated how the Western conception of coaching was not necessarily perceived equally positively in a Chinese context. However, the interviewee indicated that through training, discussions, and interventions on the job, it was possible in many cases to implement coaching as a successful management tool for the Chinese leaders. The interviewee went on to describe how she had developed a customised approach for making coaching succeed in a Chinese context:

> 'For example, 3 years ago, we tried to use peer coaching, and asked the leaders to coach each other on their safety leadership behaviours. We spent a lot of time talking about that, and our leaders still felt that they were struggling on how to support each other through coaching. Finally, we sat down and defined some questions especially for them, on some "question cards". These cards they used to ask questions in groups or in pairs. So that is something that we have done here especially to support the Chinese leaders to use the coaching and it worked really well' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

It is interesting that coaching was first perceived as an unsuccessful method of developing leaders in China, but after customisation of the training method, it was turned around into a successful experience. Thus, opposed to the previous conception, these quotations carried the view that customisation of leadership development initiatives was effective and fair to Chinese employees because such initiatives provided them with the opportunity to reach the same senior management levels as their Western colleagues. This line of reasoning fundamentally builds on the observation that Chinese leaders in the past had been less inclined than their Western colleagues to benefit from the global pedagogical initiatives for leadership development because of cultural differences.

5.5.5 Conception 5: Leadership Development as 'Learning From China'

This category of quotations goes one step further than the second conception and argues that Western companies can also learn from Chinese approaches to developing leaders. Thus, in its nature, this view does not only perceive leadership development as applied from the West to China, but the contrary, as a two-way process through which Western employees are educated and inspired by Chinese leadership principles. This suggests a rather different power relation than suggested earlier, as the Chinese leaders are no longer just conceived of as 'learners' but also educators helping to develop the company's talent management strategy (e.g., curriculum, teaching methods, and leadership pipeline).

The following quotation describes an experience of learning from Chinese leadership philosophies:

> 'In our headquarters, we recently had a very powerful session where all our top leaders were gathered. Then one of our Chinese top talents, who just has been promoted as the first Chinese Vice President, she gave a very interesting talk where she spoke about the cultural roots in China, and how these play out today in relation to being a leader in China today, as well as the challenges that modern Chinese leaders meet due to globalisation etc. … This talk included many aspects from Confucius to Barack Obama and resulted in a very nice discussion' (Per Hansen, Logistics Co, HQs).

This quotation indicated how a presentation on Chinese culture had resulted in a fruitful discussion amongst the company's senior management. The next quotation similarly described how elements of Chinese leadership could be relevant for Western companies:

> '… Another thing, I think Chinese culture, or philosophy, and also the concept of leadership, I don't think they are totally wrong. I think sometimes it's more effective than Western styles of leadership and they also have things to learn from China. For example, you know in the past decades, China grew so fast just because of the strong leadership we have. So if we look at the business situation right now here, sometimes we really need the Chinese style of leadership … So sometimes maybe we could add more Chinese concepts in our practice, regarding the Chinese philosophy about leadership, into our way of making leadership development programmes … In this way we could make it more acceptable for Chinese leaders as well … But nothing has been done like that yet, at least not a lot' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

Thus, this interviewee perceived aspects of Chinese leadership to be useful in a Western context. Because of the rapid growth of the Chinese economy as well as a general efficiency embedded in Chinese leadership styles, she argued that elements of Chinese leadership could serve as inspiration for Western companies. However, as opposed to the previous quotation, this interviewee had not yet experienced such an interest from her company.

5.5.6 Conception 6: Leadership Development as 'Nationality-Based'

In this view, the nature of leadership development is focused on the national origin of employees. Thus, being Chinese heavily influences possibilities for developing as a leader in the organisation. This perception of leadership development consequently focuses less on describing how a given content is taught and more on how groups of people of certain nationalities benefit from utilised initiatives.

The following quotation highlights the tendency of a 'glass ceiling' for Chinese employees working in Western companies:

> 'Today, I think most multinational companies have successfully achieved occupying the second level of leadership by China talents. So the problem is when this second level needs to grow to the top level. So it's very interesting they always say there is a "glass ceiling", an invisible ceiling for local Chinese talents. It's very interesting, people always say that … There is a saying in this company that the highest position a Chinese local talent can achieve is the VP. There is a level above that, so it's just to say that it's truly not easy for Chinese local talents. Retail Co has operated more than 20 years in China, and on the top leadership level we still don't have many Chinese local talents … You can see many expatriates coming to China to take on leader positions. But how many Chinese talents are assigned to other countries? It is a very interesting point. There are few. Very, very few. Many expatriates are really good, but I will also say that many actually only come because they are from Western countries. Their understanding of business and all their leadership capabilities are actually not stronger than the local talents' (Casper Fang, Retail Co, HQs).

This quotation described a 'glass ceiling' in the company preventing Chinese leaders reaching senior management positions. Notably, the interviewee argued that Chinese leaders in many cases were as good as their Western colleagues, but because of their

different nationality they failed to be promoted. According to this view, developing Chinese leaders was consequently not only associated with leveraging appropriate leadership development initiatives but also just as much about expanding the mental models of the Western HQs and accepting the idea that Chinese leaders should be exposed to opportunities to take on senior leader positions. The next quotation supports this view; however, as opposed to the previous quotation, this interviewee supported the preference of Western expatriates:

> 'I would say again everybody is equal … The only thing I feel maybe the company has a preference with is expatriates, but I think that's understandable, because those expatriates are sent into different places, and they have a very good 'Toy Co essence" to teach the local people how the right process should be done, what the right behaviour is. They can nurture the local market with the original Toy Co essence, and that's the beauty of this … Currently, China is the top location for accommodating expatriates. Expatriates here have mostly 2 to 3 year contracts, they are rotating … Currently, we have no Chinese expatriates in the West … I think it will be good for the people here to work with Toy Co anyway, since we have a really good growing model compared to other companies in China. People here don't necessarily compare themselves so strongly with those Scandinavian employees, for example. That's something not so comparable' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

Interestingly, this interviewee indicated that whilst various expatriates were sent to China to receive global exposure, no Chinese leaders were rotated as expatriates to the West. This was because of the argument that Western employees generally were perceived as superior ambassadors for promoting the company culture because of their Western origin. It is striking to notice that the same interviewee earlier argued that understanding leadership in Chinese culture did not require being Chinese, but with the right training could be acquired by people of any nationality. This view is consequently interpreted as valuing company culture above national culture.

Other quotations illustrated the same tendency but with particularly good opportunities for Chinese leaders. The following quotation describes how a group of Chinese leaders had been chosen for an exclusive leadership development programme because of their Chinese nationality:

> '… this leadership development programme was purely for China, to boost and empower our Chinese employees. I think that we have a lot of other talents across the wider Asia region that we will need to involve another time. This programme was tailored especially to the learning needs that we identified just for the China talents' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

This interviewee described that a group of Chinese leaders were selected to receive a leadership 'boost' because of the increasing need for Chinese leadership in the organisation. This need was caused by rapid growth in the Chinese market and globalisation of the economy. Another interviewee described a similar tendency; however, opposed to the previous quotation, she simply described the requirements of promotion for Chinese leaders as lower than the requirements for other nationalities:

> 'Yes, I think this is already happening in Bank Co. I do see a lot of Directors, not to say Managing Directors or Vice presidents in China who have been remarkably quickly promoted. This is just because they are in China and from China. If these people had been in Singapore, Hong Kong, he or she would never have been promoted so fast … I think it's understandable, even though it is actually an "opposite ceiling" and they accelerated faster in China' (Christina Zhu, Bank Co, HQs).

It was a common feature of all these quotations that being Chinese had a strong impact on the leaders' possibilities for engaging in leadership development initiatives and being promoted. However, whilst some companies experienced a 'glass ceiling' for Chinese leaders, others reported particularly good opportunities for employees of Chinese origin.

5.5.7 Differences of Views on Pedagogical Approaches

To summarise, various descriptions of leadership development were reported by the seven interviewees. After I identified similarities among these descriptions, I established six conceptions of leadership development as follows:

1. Leadership development as 'embedded in the corporate culture';
2. Leadership development as 'programme and workshop-based';
3. Leadership development as 'aligning values defined by headquarters';

4. Leadership development as ‘a customised approach’;
5. Leadership development as ‘learning from China’; and
6. Leadership development as ‘nationality-based’.

In this section, I consider the differences between the six conceptions. In light of Research Question 2, it is particularly interesting to distinguish between pedagogical approaches to leadership development that consider the Chinese context, and the ones that are formulated universally. On this matter, there seems to be one fundamental difference underlying the six conceptions. Regarding the first three conceptions, the descriptions are universal attempts at leadership development in the sense that they hypothetically could have been applied to any culture. In other words, nothing indicates that these views are particularly suited for a Chinese context. However, conceptions 4-6 are in their nature related specifically to a Chinese context. In light of this finding, it is interesting to further examine the more evaluative aspects concerning to what extent the different approaches to leadership development were perceived as successful by the participants. Such an examination would include exploring whether customised approaches are more successful than universal ones or vice versa. Such an analysis is conducted in Chapter 6, where I look deeper into responses to utilised leadership development initiatives. However, I first provide a description of the participants’ future ambitions for training Chinese leaders to round off this chapter.

5.6 Future Ambitions for Training Chinese Leaders

The quotations describing the current behaviour of Chinese managers and the companies’ future ambitions for leadership development could be grouped into four categories:

1) Negative behaviour of Chinese leaders;
2) Positive behaviour of Chinese leaders;
3) Future ambitions: a learning organisation; and
4) Future ambitions: holding on to company values and practices.

In the following subsections, these categories are presented and analysed.

5.6.1 Negative Behaviour of Chinese Leaders

During the interviews, negative views on the behaviour of Chinese managers were reported. Overall, these perceptions emphasised a cultural gap between Chinese and Western leaders, which often resulted in difficulties for the Chinese leaders to fit into Western culture. This tendency is described in the following quotation:

> 'This is a little bit politically sensitive. So whenever companies do leadership training, no matter which company you are in, the company would like to ensure that people think in the same way. This is why we educate and send employees to school. But Chinese people are more practical. Sometimes they will ask "what's the benefit of this?" This is different from what I noticed in European culture, especially the Scandinavians; they have more academic profiles. People in China, they lack the "Toy Co Way". It is necessary that people understand how Toy Co do things. This is the way the Scandinavian companies operate. They have a special kind of communication, and for newcomers we try to melt them into the bigger group … but there is a cultural gap here in China' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs)

This interviewee portrayed the behaviour of Chinese leaders as generally lacking an understanding of the company's way of leading because of cultural differences. Furthermore, the interviewee argued that this was caused by a more practical and less academic mindset amongst Chinese leaders.

5.6.2 Positive Behaviour of Chinese Leaders

Overall, the positive perceptions appreciated that Chinese leaders were highly disciplined and expressed a particularly strong dedication and will to learn. The following quotation illustrates this view by showing that despite cultural differences, Chinese leaders fought hard to understand the respective 'company way of leading':

> '... I think my experience in China has been that they [Chinese leaders] demonstrate a strong will to learn to improve. The Chinese leaders are very focused, they want to up their skill, they want to improve their capabilities and I think we had fantastic engagement from the people actually. I think they were excited by doing it and I think they were very competitive and wanted to get as much out of it as they could and also show that they were improving. So I haven't really got any issues from the participant

> side in terms of, you know, what I think they should change or do differently. People found that "Wow, that's quite tough", but actually I think, without exception, by the end of the program all of them said that it had proved to be very valuable. Maybe they didn't like it much to begin with, but actually I think they got some good insights, and self-learning from that which helped them actually improve and do things differently' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

Consequently, although cultural differences were encountered, this interviewee focused on the strong will and the progression of Chinese managers. Another quotation supported this view and similarly emphasised the positive behaviour and dedication of the Chinese managers:

> 'Yeah, I think the Chinese participants try their best. They did everything the facilitator asked them to do. So from my observation, most of them are doing the exercise they are told and follow the instructions. And some of them do benefit a lot from peer coaching and the exercises we expose them to. And I can see that some people, after several rounds of practice, they make progress. But, I am not sure if they go back to the office, in their daily working life, and still continue this practice. A lot of Chinese national leaders, they are quite strong on a lot of things, especially in their respective disciplines and also in their professional work; but when we talk about coaching, it is a little bit against their strong personal values and beliefs, so I feel that they are really struggling with the practice of coaching in their daily work' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

It is important to note that whilst this interviewee described Chinese managers' behaviour as dedicated and mostly as making progress, challenges with making leadership skills and capabilities 'stick' in daily work were reported too. Here, the interviewee generally acknowledged a cultural difference in leadership values.

5.6.3 Future Targets: A Learning Organisation

When the interviewees described future targets for developing leaders in China, the companies' ambitions varied significantly. Some quotations expressed a general satisfaction with their current results. These interviewees reported that they had fulfilled their KPIs and ambitions thus far, but that they were continuously working on becoming even better. A general characteristic of these quotations was that the companies sought

to improve their leadership development practices on a learning journey alongside the Chinese managers. This view is illustrated by the following quotation:

> 'In terms of how we achieved the promotional targets that we had, two out of the twenty have been promoted so far, and we are optimistic that about another eight or nine are very much on their way within the next year or so. When the opportunity arrives in the business, we think they are qualified candidates and that we have really moved them up in terms of whether they are seen to be qualified by going on this programme … Having said that there is also a lot of learning for how we can make it better. And a lot of things that we would tweak if we do it again' (Conor Walsh, Logistics Co, HQs).

Crucially, this quotation, compared with the previous one, possessed a fundamental focus, not on changing the Chinese employees' mental models but on enhancing the company's own understanding of how to create better conditions for making Chinese leaders grow in the future. Thus, these two quotations portrayed leadership development as a journey on which both Chinese leaders and the HQs were learning organisms. Another quotation highlighted the company setting up special KPIs for their development of Chinese leaders:

> 'Yes we do have ambitions for this. It's actually kind of a KPI for us … The purpose is to help the leaders make a successful transition. So that's the objective. So, every half year we come up with a number of names on a list, from a people system, and identify how many leaders in China have been moved to new positions in the past 6 months … In China, I think we did very well … In other parts of the world it is not going so well. I think that maybe because in other parts of the world people think it is the leaders' own responsibility to develop. But in China we really want to achieve the target, so we chase the leaders a lot' (Marie Fan, Oil Co, HQs).

It is an interesting point that every half a year the company moderated the strategy for developing Chinese leaders in terms of what seemed to be realistic. In general, the high motivation for developing leaders in China had resulted in particularly good results compared with other country offices. Another quotation supported the view of the HQs learning alongside the Chinese leaders. However, this interviewee exemplified how the Western HQs did not share this opinion:

> 'I want to ask, can we develop a system to evaluate Chinese talents that isn't just with standardised criteria? I have not seen this happening … It is true that China is an

> emerging market, and Chinese talents do have some weaknesses, seen from a global view, and lack some of the strategic insights which they have overseas. But another question is whether we have fair and transparent global evaluation criteria, without cultural biases. I think we have a problem here … Today, Chinese talents in multinational companies, they cannot break the glass ceiling. But the glass ceiling doesn't have to be broken from downstairs; it can be broken from upstairs too. And we need somebody to take the first step … It would be the most powerful if it came from the top. They need to show a good gesture, to show that they believe … Ten years ago, they already set up a talent strategy to build up a Chinese leadership team locally, but it still doesn't work. So unless we have a global talent strategy for China, we cannot rely on the local talent strategy … So if multinational companies really think the Chinese market is important, and they really are determined to build local Chinese leadership, they need to show that they believe in China and start to truly break the barriers' (Casper Wang, Retail Co, HQs).

As with the two previous quotations, this interviewee described the ambition of breaking the glass ceiling by better understanding Chinese leadership culture and developing initiatives to accommodate the needs. However, it is interesting to note that this interviewee reported a high level of frustration because this interest and ambition was not shared with the Western HQs. According to this interviewee, the lack of alignment in the talent development strategy between Western senior management and the Chinese organisation was potentially harmful for the leadership development practise of Chinese leaders in the company.

Thus, the quotations in this category generally described leadership as an interdependent relationship wherein the company was learning alongside the Chinese managers and continuously evaluated their talent training initiatives against what seemed to work in a Chinese context.

5.6.4 Future Targets: Holding on to Company Values and Practices

Another group of quotations described a less flexible leadership development strategy in China. These interviewees reported a strong focus on implementing similar company values globally. Here, it was less important whether the company leaders were Chinese

and more important whether they were considered competent to represent the company's values in different parts of the world. This view is expressed in the following quotation:

> 'Toy Co have an ambition of developing great leaders, not just in China. We are in the process of having more people understand our local markets all over the world … That's the way to ensure we don't lose a strong competitiveness. We must develop good leaders, with good experience, so that's the ambition I would say … I don't have an exact number for our ambition for developing Chinese leaders. In terms of nationality, our leaders could be Hong-Kongese, Taiwanese. We don't need to acquire locals; it doesn't matter where you're from. Even if you are French, if you know the Chinese market, the Chinese landscape, the language, our consumer needs, our channels - then it doesn't matter what kind of nationality you are' (Lily Zhao, Toy Co, HQs).

This view was less focused on nationality. As long as the leaders were competent and understood the local market sufficiently, it was not considered important which country they were from. Thus, as opposed to the previous category, this view in its nature was less focused on contextualising leadership development initiatives to Chinese culture; it focused on providing identical company values and leadership development initiatives globally.

5.7 Summary

The purpose of this part of the study was to deepen the understanding of the foreign companies' conceptions of leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China.

The different views on leadership could be grouped into four categories of descriptions: (1) 'harmony searching'; (2) 'cultural competence'; (3) 'heroic'; and (4) 'collaborative and contextual'. The first two views, 'harmony searching' and 'cultural competence', mainly referred to leadership practices in China. The two other conceptions, 'heroic' and 'collaborative and contextual', described leadership more generally and less connected to a cultural context. Overall, the interviewees described Chinese leaders as particularly motivated and disciplined compared with employees in other parts of the world. In was a central point that Chinese leaders generally possessed a high 'feeling of attachment' and loyalty to the company, and thus contributed positively to the organisational coherence.

The negative quotes stressed the tendency of Chinese leaders to avoid engaging in conflicts and be indecisive and less confrontational in their leadership styles, which according to this view, caused difficulties for them in occupying strategic senior roles. Moreover, a lack of global exposure caused by China's recent entry onto the global modern business scene was mentioned. This view highlighted that Chinese leaders lacked the strategic knowledge required for taking on positions within global management.

When answering whether interviewees tended to agree or disagree with the six leadership paradigms presented in Chapter 2 (see Table 5.3), the majority reported either sympathising with bottom-up or top-down types of leadership. Thus, they viewed heroic and collective leadership to be opposing and fundamentally incompatible. In this chapter, only 2 interviewees tended to agree with all paradigms (both of Chinese origin). Consequently, this study found that whilst the Chinese high-potential employees in the previous chapter tended to hold a holistic view on leadership, the interviewees of Western origin presented a more selective view.

Throughout the data, 6 views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China were identified. These were leadership development as: (1) 'embedded in the corporate culture'; (2) 'programme and workshop-based'; (3) 'aligning globally to company values'; (4) 'customising approaches'; (5) 'learning from China'; and (6) 'nationality-based'. Overall, in conceptions 1-3 it emphasised different pedagogical initiatives aiming to implement targets and values defined by the Western headquarters. It was the general view that customising leadership initiatives and nurturing certain cultures were considered unfair. By contrast, a common feature of conceptions 4-6 was that Western companies could also learn from Chinese companies in their ways of developing leaders. This included being inspired by ancient and contemporary Chinese leadership philosophies in their training and development practices. Because acquisition of Chinese leaders has become an increasingly important part of the companies' global leadership strategies in recent years, customised leadership development initiatives were implemented to Chinese leaders. This was done because Chinese people in general in the past progressed significantly slower than did their colleagues when exposed to Western leadership development initiatives. Thus, these approaches were particularly tailored to accommodating the needs of Chinese high-potentials to equip them with the sufficient

skills and competencies to take on leadership roles in multinational companies. The interviewees occasionally stepped in and out of these four different views during the interviews.

In terms of future targets for leadership development in China, two different types of ambitions were reported. The first group of interviewees emphasised that developing leaders of Chinese origin was of high priority and a vital part of the companies' pedagogical strategy. In general, this view highlighted the need of the headquarters to be part of the learning process and continuously improve the quality of their leadership development initiatives in China alongside the development of Chinese leaders. By contrast, the other group of interviewees expressed the view that no nationality should be favoured above others, and that leadership development initiatives in the future would be conducted similarly in different cultures. The latter view did not have any exact numbers for objectives or KPIs regarding the development of Chinese leaders as such.

CHAPTER 6 – Reactions to Leadership Development Initiatives

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the empirical findings linked to Research Question 3:

3. To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?

This question is explored using the descriptions from Phase I of the data collection (see Section 3.6.2). This chapter identifies perceived successful and unsuccessful approaches to developing leadership in China. Throughout the chapter, these findings are held up against the Western headquarters' views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China (see Chapter 5). This is done to gain an understanding of the participants' reactions to the utilised approaches and consequently determine the extent to which the headquarters' approaches to leadership development were perceived as successful by the Chinese managers. From the 24 interviews, three themes were identified:

1. Successful leadership development approaches;
2. Unsuccessful leadership development approaches; and
3. Suggestions for future improvements to leadership development in China.

6.2 Successful Leadership Development Approaches

In this section, I present five 'categories of descriptions' derived from the interviews concerning successful approaches to leadership development. These categories are based on an analysis of responses to the questions: 'To what extent is your company successful at developing leaders in China?' and 'What approaches to leadership development have you found particularly effective?' In the following subsections, these categories and their differences and similarities are presented and analysed.

6.2.1 Successful Perception 1: 'Exposure to Senior Management'

The first category concerns exposure to senior management. These interviewees highlighted positive experiences with training courses that include the possibility for engaging with senior management. Successful leadership development is described here as classroom teaching sessions supported by the companies' senior management. A valuable feature is that the senior managers are able to share their experience and knowledge during the courses. The following quotation describes a positive experience with participating in a leadership development course where a group of the company's top leaders were present:

> 'The programme I just attended was incredible. The best thing about it was that we solved a real-life project, with a very strict timeline, and we got to present directly to the management board, the highest rank in the company. It made me take the training very seriously. The module had around five or six top leaders sitting with us in the classroom. Each one of those senior leaders would observe two to three of us. After each day's class, the senior staff would give us feedback on our participation. In the beginning, we felt really uncomfortable, as if we were monitored. This pressure for participation is not a very natural thing for Chinese employees. As you know, our culture is quieter. So this was very different and a very good experience for me as a leader' (Josephine Fan, Logistics, HPE).

Notably, this interviewee described working directly with the top management as initially being particularly uncomfortable because of her Chinese culture. She argued that Chinese culture is quieter and less inclined to engage directly with the top leaders of the company. However, after a short while it felt more natural and ended up being a fruitful experience. In another quotation, the interviewee supported this view and further described that engaging with senior leaders made her feel a high level of recognition:

> 'One of the best training programmes I have ever experienced was a 5-month programme focusing on Chinese leaders. It was a combination of group work and classroom lectures. A large number of senior managers came in person to the classroom and engaged with us during the training and provided feedback to groups and individuals. That was very powerful. I felt a high level of recognition and appreciation for staying so close to them. I learned from them and got a chance to perform in front of them and learn where I could improve as a leader' (Winnie, Logistics Co, HPE).

Moreover, it is interesting to note that this programme was targeted at Chinese leaders only. The recognition was consequently aimed not only at the interviewee as an individual but also provided the image that the company valued and prioritised their Chinese leaders.

The quotes in this category provide a picture of an approach to leadership development that was formally arranged, and thus quite isolated from daily work in the sense that it tended to focus on teaching sessions in classroom contexts. The view on leadership development, in its nature, was thus focused on attending teaching and training as an external activity practiced in courses, workshops, and programmes. This pedagogical approach to leadership development is mainly embedded in the conception of leadership development as 'programme and workshop-based', as described by the Headquarters in the previous chapter. However, because this approach was aimed at Chinese leaders and tailored to their needs (specifically learning to speak up and engage directly with senior leaders), it additionally overlapped with the category of 'a customised approach'.

6.2.2 Successful Perception 2: 'Rotation Schemes'

The second category of perceived successful approaches to leadership development in China regard rotation schemes. In this view, the use of rotation is a valuable tool for developing leaders in China. In particular, such schemes are seen as a pedagogical approach to stimulate strategic thinking, establish a broader overview of the organisation, and develop constructive networks. The following quotation argues that rotation schemes particularly containing global exposure were successful for developing strategic thinking amongst participants:

> 'I think the global exposure Logistics Co give us through their rotation schemes is very successful. I think first of all we need strategic thinking, we need to think broadly and holistically, instead of very shallow thinking and only focus on the day-t- day work. So, we need to be able to consider what is happening abroad too. We often don't get this knowledge just from working in China. This is the number one thing for being a top leader; you need to be able to engage in some conceptional discussions, instead of just very specific day-to-day discussions' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

Notably, this interviewee indicated that strategic thinking and an organisational overview were not achieved by working in China alone. Consequently, rotating Chinese leaders periodically into other country offices to learn from the work practices there was considered beneficial. The next quotation supports this view; however, as opposed to describing experiences with global rotation schemes, the interviewee indicated the positive sides to rotating internally in the Chinese organisation across different functions:

> 'The most important thing for the training programmes is that other Directors and Senior Directors from different departments are sitting in the same training class for four modules, in closed-door training. That is very valuable for cross-functional communication. I made very good friends with my colleagues there and it's so much easier for future work. It's just simply a phone call, you don't need to write such a long email to explain. I see it as a very, very important thing. In this training room we just turned off our Blackberry's and shut off our emails. We were just there to make friends and talk with peers' (Philip Zhan, Retail Co, HPE).

An important aspect of this quote is that it described cross-functional rotation schemes as a useful opportunity for gaining insights into how colleagues in other functions approached leadership challenges on the job. Moreover, it contributed to breaking down boundaries and encouraging spontaneous collaboration, and in general to creating a shared company culture in daily work.

Thus, a general characteristic of this category was that rotation schemes were perceived as successful in terms of aligning company culture across country offices and different functions. When interpreting this category in light of the pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China described in the previous chapter, these quotations were best related to the conception 'embedded in the corporate culture'.

6.2.3 Successful Perception 3: 'Individual Development Plans'

The third category of perceived successful leadership development approaches regards individual development plans. In contrast to the previous two categories, the distinctive characteristic of this view is that leadership development is perceived as occurring on the job, and not through programmes, workshops, or schemes. Thus, opposed to external

training programmes, individual development plans are considered a successful tool for scaffolding and supporting leaders, teams, and organisations during their daily work. The following quote describes how individual development plans were a central part of the company culture:

> 'I think leadership development at Logistics Co in China is quite successful. Even some colleagues who quit Logistics Co and joined other Chinese companies, they will come back and say, "Logistics Co is really better at growing people". They help you to become a better version of yourself by structuring some very good and very systematized individual development plans. HR even helps you to build up your CV, so in case you want to go and work somewhere else, you can do that too. They really care about your career' (Josephine Fan, Logistics Co, HPE).

This described the way in which the company set clear targets for the development of its individuals and how this was considered a successful leadership development approach. In particular, this interviewee emphasised that the company helped build up employees' CVs in case they should wish to pursue a career elsewhere at a later stage. Such initiatives created a feeling of care in the company culture, which the employee appreciated. In the following quote, a different interviewee positively perceived her company creating special score cards for its employees, teams, and organisations:

> 'In this company, we have "KPI score cards" to structure the development plans. I think it's a very useful tool to track your performance, to remind you how you performed in the past and of the expectations to you for the next year. We have very specific score cards for all of the senior levels, which is motivational. We also have organisational score cards, country score cards, team score cards, department score cards, as well as the most important individual score cards so we know where to focus' (Christine Yang, Logistics Co, HPE).

This interviewee viewed scorecards as a useful tool for tracking performance and in general she found it motivating to know exactly what to do and where to focus to develop as a leader. The following quote highlights the feedback mechanisms incorporated into individual development plans:

> 'The individual development plans are good tools that help us develop as leaders. Basically, these leadership plans will show us our "blind spots". We use the "360-degree feedback" system, which is very good. Sometimes you may feel nervous to get the

> feedback, but once you received the report it's quite good. Because it divides you into different groups of the stakeholders, for example, your boss may be quite satisfied with you, but maybe your internal customers think you have room to improve. So when I see the report, I suddenly get insights. So I think it's really good, for me and for the company' (Qian Chen, Oil Co, HPE).

This quotation described 360-degree feedback analysis as a valuable tool for highlighting the different stakeholders' levels of satisfaction with the employees. It was briefly mentioned that these processes could be sensitive to the employee in question. Notably, whilst the quotations in this category all appreciated the corporate culture caused by the development plans, no considerations were mentioned as to whether this approach to leadership development was considered particularly well-suited to developing leaders in China. Because this approach to leadership development was performed on the job with the aim of rewarding certain types of behaviour and achievements in daily work, it was considered as rooted in the conception of leadership development as 'embedded in the corporate culture' described by the Headquarters in Chapter 5. However, because the scorecards contained the option of being tailored and modified individually to each country office, this category could potentially also overlap with the conception 'a customised approach'.

6.2.4 Successful Perception 4: 'Mentoring'

In this fourth view, the interviewees reported learning from a mentor to help support their professional development. As with the previous category, the pedagogical starting point here is that leadership development by nature is perceived as occurring on the job. However, as opposed to the previous category, the ongoing daily interplay between a superior and subordinates is seen as the most successful accelerator for developing leaders in China. The following quote illustrates how daily interactions with the boss were viewed as successfully stimulating leadership development:

> 'We don't have a lot of training, I think it's more about on-the-job practice here. I appreciate that we do have some training to learn some leadership skills, but I generally agree that most experience with leadership should be gained from the daily job. For example, I can look at a boss I really like, and then I can learn from him or her. Then I

> learn from the person, instead of skills in the classroom. So watching and learning I think is even better than the skills I learned from the classroom' (Bo Guan, Bank Co, HPE).

This interviewee indicated perceived leadership development mostly as occurring in the interplay between leaders and subordinates. The following quotation support this view and further describes how the interviewee's company had established a corporate university designing and implementing mentor/mentee programmes:

> 'I think Retail Co is quite successful in developing leaders in China. I have a lot of good people surrounding me, working with me, and supporting me on the job. When new people join, from the very start someone is mentoring them. In this way, we lead by example; we get a role model. We all try to be some kind of role model … The "Retail Co University" also pair us up with some highly talented people when they design their mentor/mentee programmes' (Philip Zhan, Retail Co, HPE).

Such a view has implications for the availability of the mentor and the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Moreover, it relies on mentors acting in accordance with intended company values and with the capability of inspiring and motivating subordinates to do the same.

Thus, amongst the experienced leadership development initiatives, ongoing and informal 'on-the-job' initiatives were perceived as successful, as opposed to training courses and other formal interventions. Of the views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development in China described by the headquarters, this category is in accordance with the conception describing leadership development as 'embedded in the corporate culture'. However, it could potentially contain aspects of the conceptions 'customising approaches' and 'aligning company values', depending on how strictly the mentors were instructed to impose global values on the employees' behaviour.

6.2.5 Successful Perception 5: 'Balancing out Power Relations Through Teamwork'

The most prominent characteristic of the final category of successful perceptions is pedagogical approaches to balancing out power differences during group discussions.

These interviewees described that a central problem for Chinese leaders is speaking up and voicing opinions when required to. The fact that the Chinese leaders kept silent was not interpreted as lacking opinions or knowledge on the given topics; on the contrary, Chinese leaders were often perceived as having ideas and perspectives but chose to keep silent because of cultural differences in the conceptualisations of leadership and power. In this view, pedagogical approaches to outbalancing power relations, such as 'turn-taking', are successful ways of encouraging Chinese leaders to speak up in daily work during meetings and group discussions, as highlighted in the following quote:

> 'Chinese leaders often don't speak up. But from my understanding, everyone almost always has an opinion. In situations where someone doesn't speak up, my company has often succeeded in arranging a routine in the group work discussions so that everyone gets to say something. For example, we may be asked to take turns in sharing our opinions. In this way they try to balancing out the sense of power and authority and give everyone a chance to speak. If we have a group of five, maybe two of are quite talkative and eager to show off, but the remaining three are very quiet. Does that mean he or she has no ideas? No, definitely not. Chinese people are very smart. Keeping silent does not mean that they have nothing to share. So the best idea is, when we have discussions, we take turns: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. We take turns to speak and to lead the discussions, to do the PowerPoint presentation, and things like that. In this way we try to create equal participation and opportunity' (Christine Yang, Logistics Co, HPE).

An interesting aspect here is that not voicing an opinion was not considered equal to not having an opinion. By applying a group work structure where everyone was forced to contribute, the most talkative employees were to a less extent able to dominate the discussion, and the Chinese managers gained experience with sharing views and opinions. A second quotation supported this view and further described that being forced to speak in small groups would help build confidence to present and speak up in bigger groups at a later stage:

> 'It is good when we have group discussions. It is like you're placed in groups and a question is asked and the groups discuss, and then later we present for the entire class. In the groups we do turn-taking, so everyone is sort of forced to say something when it is their turn. So everyone in the group has to individually share their experience or opinions. In the long run they become more confident at speaking up' (Baoyun Li, Bank Co, HPE).

Thus, the interviewee suggested that by using turn-taking, the Chinese managers were successfully trained in voicing opinions. The following quotation describes a similar tendency and further adds positive experiences of allowing participants to speak Chinese in the initial small groups:

> 'One of our challenges has been that our Chinese leaders don't feel comfortable to speak up. Then the company tried some techniques on how to encourage people to speak up. For example, they tried to establish a comfortable working environment. Logistics Co believe their employees have got something to offer. Maybe they just don't want to speak in front of a big group, then we will spend some time separately in groups of three or four people first. Sometimes we are also allowed to speak in Chinese, just first, to try to open up our minds, "open the door". All such things work really well in China, to help making the Chinese more outspoken' (Ivan Chen, Logistics Co, HPE).

Notably, the interviewee described that once a small group of peers had confirmed the relevance of a Chinese manager's opinion or statement in Chinese, it was significantly easier to present this view in English to a bigger group of people at a later stage. In this way, the company aimed to create a feeling of 'physiological safety' in the corporate culture.

Thus, the structure of formally allowing and encouraging employees to speak up, was viewed as a powerful tool for outbalancing power distances within groups of people and, ultimately, change the behaviour of the Chinese leaders to be more outspoken. A central point of the first interviewee was that this structure of interaction could be utilised in meetings and discussions concerning experiences and opinions. Consequently, it was not the point of this initiative to expose employees' potential lack of knowledge to the group, or put them in a situation where they were not able to answer a given question. On the contrary, the intention was to engender positive experiences with speaking up and, as mentioned in the second quotation, generate confidence to speak up in the future. This view on successful leadership development has the implication that someone in the organisation with a sufficient amount of authority would need to implement this structure of information exchange confidently and manage it to make the employees understand why this way of interacting is necessary. Among the pedagogical approaches described in the previous chapter, this view aimed to establish a corporate culture of psychological safety, and thus may first and foremost be traced back to the conception describing leadership development as 'embedded in the corporate culture'. However,

because lacking the ability to speak up was a problem reported particularly amongst Chinese leaders, it additionally overlaps with the conception ‘a customised approach’.

6.2.6 Comparing Successful Perceptions

To summarise this empirical part of the study, various initiatives for leadership development in China were perceived as successful. After interviewing 24 Chinese managers, I identified the following five categories of successful approaches:

1. Successful leadership development as ‘exposure to senior management’;
2. Successful leadership development as ‘rotation schemes’;
3. Successful leadership development as ‘individual development plans’;
4. Successful leadership development as ‘mentoring’; and
5. Successful leadership development as ‘balancing out power through teamwork’.

Next, I examined the nature of the differences between these categories of descriptions. In general, there seemed to be two fundamental differences underlying the five categories. First, categories one and two concern initiatives that were conducted through isolated training programmes. In particular, these initiatives focused on exposure to senior management and rotation schemes. Thus, both of these approaches to leadership development had implications for large investments of money and time in terms of arranging rotation schemes, identifying a curriculum, setting up partnerships, and reserving time with senior management. By contrast, categories three and four concern initiatives occurring on the job. In particular, these approaches focused on setting up individual development plans and establishing safe learning environments in the workplace. Thus, these initiatives had implications for employees, such as those in HR, to help alleviate the full potential of already existing leadership potential in the workforce as well as make sure inspirational leaders are recruited and promoted for the subordinates to learn from. In other words, these two categories essentially relied on collaborative learning environments, in which the Chinese managers could develop their leadership skills and capabilities. The fifth category stood out in the sense that it included a training approach that could be implemented both on courses and on the job. Thus, embedded in this approach were ideas of formal teaching and on-the-job learning

initiatives. This approach to leadership development required a leader or an HR employee to sell the idea of turn-taking to the Chinese leaders and ensure that the structure was used appropriately.

Second, another difference was the extent to which the leadership development approaches considered Chinese culture. Categories one, two, four, and five explicitly reported approaches considered particularly suitable for Chinese culture. These interviewees suggested that the approaches were useful in terms of dealing particularly with Chinese leaders' lack of ability to speak up, strategic thinking, and global outreach. By contrast, the quotes in category four did not present any reasons why this approach to leadership development was particularly successful in China.

Finally, when relating these descriptions of successful leadership development initiatives in China to the pedagogical views outlined in Chapter 5, three conceptions were perceived to be particularly successful. These were leadership development as:

1) 'Programme and workshop-based';
2) 'A customised approach'; and
3) 'Embedded in the corporate culture'.

6.3 Unsuccessful Leadership Development Approaches

In this section, I present five categories of approaches perceived as unsuccessful by the interviewees. These categories are based on an analysis of responses to the questions: 'To what extent is your company less successful at developing leaders in China?' and 'What approaches to leadership development have you found particularly ineffective?' In the following subsection, these empirically derived categories and their differences and similarities are outlined and analysed.

6.3.1 Unsuccessful Perception 1: 'Lack of Investments in Top Leaders'

In the first category of negative perceptions, the interviewees reported a lack of initiatives aimed at developing Chinese leaders for top positions. Whilst various

initiatives for development are offered on the lower organisational levels, the companies do not invest much in initiatives supporting the transition from manager to top leadership positions. The following quotation describes this tendency and how it ended up creating a 'glass ceiling' for Chinese leaders:

> 'I think Bank Co is less successful [at developing leaders in China]. When I was a management trainee, they did provide leadership development programmes and they cared about helping me to grow professionally. However, what happens in these Western companies that the so called glass ceiling – a lack of opportunities for Chinese people to develop into the higher positions. So we do have a cultural conflict, which is not good' (Xiong Wang, Bank Co, HPE).

Interestingly, this quotation reported that this tendency was particularly true for Chinese leaders working in Western companies, and moreover, that it was caused by conflicting cultural differences. Another quotation supported this view and stated that the formal training ceased around Vice President level:

> 'No one will be helping you from Vice President to Director level. The leadership development programmes I attended were all for managers going from the junior to the middle level. Currently, I am at the Vice President level and I think the things I have learned worked quite well up until now. But we have very few programmes and formal training helping us from VP to Director level. Here we have a gap in our development of leaders in China' (Chi Yo Du, Bank Co, HPE).

Thus, in common for these quotations is that the interviewees perceived their companies as less successful in developing Chinese leaders in the higher positions. This view has implications for the motivation of employees and for the retaining of talents that wish to pursue a career where they have a chance of being promoted into top positions.

Whilst employees of other nationalities managed successfully to take on company values and progress into senior management positions, Chinese managers did not manage to align with the Western company values to a similar extent. Of the approaches to leadership development outlined in Chapter 5, this category consequently mainly relates to the conception 'aligning to company values'. However, because the interviewees called for more opportunities within formal training programmes to solve

the problem, the category also overlaps with the conception 'programme and workshop-based'.

6.3.2 Unsuccessful Perception 2: 'Unclear Criteria for Selection'

The second category of perceived negative leadership development initiatives concerns companies providing unclear criteria for selecting talents for their training programmes and requirements for promotion. The uncertainty of talent selection caused a feeling of insecurity and lack of confidence amongst the Chinese leaders. The following quotation highlights how the secretive processes around selection of talents to leadership development caused an unpleasant feeling:

> 'When they select people for leadership programmes it's always very secretive. You don't get an announcement in the whole finance department like, "Okay, we are introducing this programme for the top performers" … If people just kept their attendance as a secret, and no one knew, it would be fine. But usually other people will notice; "Oh, there are certain people who attended this training, because the boss thinks they are better than us". Then you get this unpleasant feeling of "Why didn't I get promoted?' or "Why didn't I get picked to attend this training?" So I am thinking there should be some kind of announcement or clear criteria as to why some people get selected, so it can be a bit fair to others. … If they set up leadership training criteria, then people will know what they need to work on' (Stella Fang, Bank Co, HPE).

Another interviewee supported this category and further stressed a lack of clear criteria regarding selection for promotions:

> 'The company is giving me more opportunities, but I'm still not quite sure when I will see my next role. It is not quite clear what my next potential role would be. So I don't really know what's going to happen. I would like to know if I potentially can be promoted to Senior Director, and maybe get an approximate timeframe, so I can work very hard to get promoted. I don't really know what I need to do and if it's going to happen. That is quite demotivating' (Philip Zhang, Retail Co, HPE).

Thus, it is a central point for both interviewees that not knowing what it takes to be selected and not having an estimated timeframe for when it might happen was as perceived as demotivating. Consequently, this view has implications for the construction and implementation of rigorous individual development plans with clear criteria and goals for how the managers have performed in the past, and what exact changes of

behaviour are required for them to progress further and be selected for training programmes.

These quotations reflected a lack of understanding regarding what it took to live up to the criteria valued and appreciated in the organisations. The interviewees described this tendency as a cultural misunderstanding, and hence as an unsuccessful attempt to apply Western headquarters' values to a Chinese context. This category consequently relates to the conception 'aligning to company values' outlined in the previous chapter. However, as the unclear criteria for selection were part of the daily work, it overlaps slightly with the conception 'embedded in the corporate culture'.

6.3.3 Unsuccessful Perception 3: 'Lack of Purpose'

The third group of negative perceptions describes a lack of purpose in the leadership development approaches. Generally, there was a missing understanding amongst the employees as to why they are exposed to the training activities they are exposed to. They gain the impression that random initiatives for professional development are chosen out of the blue without a clear link to the companies' talent development strategy or leadership purpose. The following quotation describes how the company's 'ad hoc' approach to leadership development is perceived as unsuccessful:

> 'We have done a lot of coaching in our leadership training. But it is not very systematic. If I should say something that needs to improve, it must be put into a system; for example, compared to my first company [a global Western FMCG company] here there was a very good training curriculum. They made the training plans for us for each year. Toy Co is more like, "Oh, we've got this programme, you can attend it, if you like' (Charles Shi, Toy Co, HPE).

This interviewee consequently suggested the training activities be put into a system, in transparent training plans, to ensure that every individual could follow the purpose of why they were exposed to different training activities. A second quotation supported this view and highlighted not being able to operationalise the values and content associated with the 'company way of leading' in the interviewee's daily practise as a leader:

> 'I was offered a training session and that was a failure to be honest. It was about the "Toy Co way of leading" or something. It was something about not just being a single

> individual, but part of a group. I think we were supposed to just take the training and let it absorb. I didn't remember much of it. I didn't really know where to apply it or how to use it' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

A central aspect of this interview quote was that the participant did not understand how to apply the content of this course to her daily work. A third quote similarly emphasised a mentor programme for leadership development, which was not taken seriously by the participants:

> 'We do have a mentor programme. But it's a formality rather than the functionality. It is probably because people don't take it so seriously, that's why it doesn't run very well. I don't know how good it could be if both the mentor and mentee worked hard to make it work. But from past experience, I didn't see this working' (Stella Fang, Bank Co, HPE).

This quotation described how the participants simply did not buy into the importance of the initiative. Consequently, this category has implications for the HR function to ensure that the underlying purpose of the training activities is clearly explained and that the participants are supported in their attempts at applying the knowledge subsequently in their daily jobs.

Thus, these interviewees generally reported a lack of understanding of the company way of leading and the values and practices associated with it. Put differently, the company way of leading, which was defined by the Headquarters, lacked sense and purpose in a Chinese context. Consequently, this category relates to the conception 'aligning to company values' described in Chapter 5.

6.3.4 Unsuccessful Perception 4: 'Lack of Cultural Understanding'

In this fourth category of negative perceptions, the interviewees reported a lack of cultural understanding in the companies' leadership development initiatives in China. Here Western-based leadership development initiatives are implemented without appropriately considering Chinese ways of conceptualising and enacting leadership. This view thus perceives the implementation of leadership development initiatives solely based on Western theory as an unsuccessful approach to developing leaders in the Chinese workforce. Consequently, this perspective advocated for a raised awareness regarding Chinese ways of thinking about leadership. The following quotation argues

that Chinese leaders buy less into the corporate culture when based solely on Western values and practices:

> 'I could say there's still room for improvement in their [the company's] ways of developing leaders. Overall, they have a lot of Scandinavian leaders who try to enforce a Scandinavian culture here. They develop leaders in the "Toy Co way". But we often experience issues with the newly joined Chinese leaders here. Their style of leadership doesn't seem to fit very well with this Scandinavian culture, the "Toy Co culture"' (Charles Shi, Toy Co, HPE).

This quotation described how a Scandinavian standardised approach to leadership development failed to succeed amongst Chinese leaders. This happened, according to the interviewee, because this approach did not consider possibilities for including any elements of Chinese leadership and leadership development, and instead uncompromisingly introduced Scandinavian values and practices. The following quotation supported this view and explicitly stated a need for Western companies to learn from Chinese practices when developing leaders in China:

> 'The big overseas boss and the managers overseas need training on what Chinese leadership is. Just like we learn about Western leadership, they also need to understand and accept parts of the Chinese ways of leading. Our chances to impact the global seniors around this are currently very limited' (Chi Yo Du, Bank Co, HPE).

Notably, this interviewee suggested that Western companies at the top management level learn about Chinese leadership and leadership development. A third quotation provided a similar point and highlighted that Western companies improving their understanding Chinese culture in their leadership development strategies was related to trust:

> 'The Western managers must improve their understanding of what China is; what Chinese leaders are doing, and how we are thinking as leaders. This is about understanding and trusting our behaviour, and trusting their own decision to promote us as leaders in the first place. In China, we have a saying that [speaks Chinese], which means that: "If you have doubts in a person, you should never use him. If you use him, please do not doubt his actions". They cannot promote leaders first and afterwards not trust us' (Xiong Wang, Bank Co, HPE).

Thus, this interviewee indicated the importance of embracing Chinese ways of leading, and especially trusting Chinese leaders to a higher degree once they are promoted. These

perspectives have implications for Chinese leaders feeling motivated and recognised professionally when working in Western companies.

Consequently, these participants saw value in the Chinese way of developing leaders, and therefore suggested that Western headquarters learn from Chinese practices. This view is consistent with the conception 'learning from China' portrayed by the Western headquarters in Chapter 5. Additionally, because the interviewees suggested customising leadership development approaches on behalf of this learning process, it also overlapped slightly with the conception of leadership development as 'customising approaches'.

6.3.5 Unsuccessful Perception 5: 'Using ABCs'

The fifth perception concerns the approach of hiring leaders of Chinese origin who lived, studied, and worked their entire lives in Western countries. This type of employee is referred to as an 'ABC' [American Born Chinese[15]']. ABCs are viewed as an attempt to acquire leaders who are familiar with Western and Chinese styles of leading, and consequently could be successful in the Chinese organisations of Western companies. However, whilst ABCs in this view physically looked Chinese and in some cases also had mastered the Chinese language, they are perceived as lacking a general understanding of the Chinese market and Chinese styles of leading because their affiliation with China is sparse. This approach of hiring leaders simply because of their Chinese origin is in this view perceived as companies trying to apply a 'quick fix' for succeeding in the Chinese market, and not truly being interested in actually understanding the Chinese ways of leading or the potential advantages linked to such styles of leadership. In the following quotation, the interview perceived the approach of hiring ABC leaders in an attempt to succeed on the Chinese market negatively:

> 'Sometimes they take in leaders who are Chinese and have lived and studied in the West for their entire lives, even at elementary school, so their culture is mostly Western. When they come to China, these people don't know anything about the Chinese market and our leadership culture. Many banks like to hire them for China Heads because they look Chinese but come from the West. But do they really understand Chinese culture?

[15] The term 'ABC' is used to describe the tendency of Western companies hiring leaders of Chinese origin who spent their entire lives in the West, not necessarily in the US.

> Not at all, because they have grown up in the West. Their culture is Western culture. So my personal feeling is that the cultural gap is very big. I don't understand what these ABCs are doing, and I cannot give them my trust as leaders. We need to understand each other better. Western people also need to understand more about us, how the market is, how our leadership is. If we get Chinese people as top leaders, we will definitely have more success. But they need to truly want to understand—no matter if it's a pop song, or a TV series, whatever it is—just try to understand the culture and don't isolate yourselves from us' (Xiong Wang, Bank Co, HPE).

This interviewee suggested that a genuine interest in understanding the cultural aspects around Chinese leadership was necessary to successfully develop Chinese leaders. The approach of hiring leaders from a Western culture but of Chinese origin was perceived as having a lack of interest in truly wanting to understand the characteristics of Chinese leadership. By contrast, this interviewee welcomed a more comprehensive process of understanding the cultural aspects and fundamental assumptions of Chinese employees. Additionally, a second interviewee reported that speaking Chinese and looking Chinese was not enough to sufficiently understand the complexity of Chinese business culture:

> 'They often hire ABCs who are already very Western. They can speak Chinese, but I think they gradually realised that speaking the Chinese language is not enough to do business in China. You need to know the language of what is being said between the lines, you need to know the network and the chemistry between people to be a successful leader. One thing is what someone says, another thing is what it really means and the leaders here need to be very sensitive to those signals. As a foreigner, you are not necessarily sensitive to those signals, that's my feeling' (Jie Li, Toy Co, HPE).

This interviewee highlighted that various important cues were communicated 'between the lines', which required a comprehensive cultural understanding to pick up on, and consequently were not fully understood by ABC leaders. This view has implications for the decision of whether to invest in developing local talents 'from scratch' into top positions or to acquire outside talent with 'Chinese characteristics'.

Because these interviewees welcomed Western Headquarters expressing a genuine interest in learning about Chinese culture, leadership, and values by hiring leaders of Chinese nationality, this category of unsuccessful perceptions is naturally linked to the 'nationality-based' conception described in Chapter 5.

6.3.6 Comparing Conceptions

To summarise, the different leadership development initiatives perceived as unsuccessful by the interviewees were multifaceted. From the interviews with 24 Chinese managers, I identified the following five categories:

1. Unsuccessful leadership development as 'lack of investments in top leaders';
2. Unsuccessful leadership development as 'unclear criteria for selection';
3. Unsuccessful leadership development as 'lack of purpose;'
4. Unsuccessful leadership development as 'lack of cultural understanding'; and
5. Unsuccessful leadership development as 'using ABCs'.

Overall, there seems to be at least one fundamental difference underlying the five categories. First, categories one to three mainly concern limitations on specific development programmes. In other words, the negative perceptions concerning a lack of investment in top leaders, unclear criteria for selection, and a lack of purpose during leadership development activities are all related to specific training programmes. By contrast, by nature, categories four and five relate to fundamental cultural differences of leadership development in China and the West. Thus, the first three categories have implications for the design and implementation of leadership development programmes that Chinese managers were exposed to, such as individual development plans, frequency of training activities, and sense-making of activities. By contrast, the two latter categories request that headquarters show a genuine interest in and understanding of the local culture when developing leaders in China. Thus, these two categories have implications for the companies' willingness and capability to learn from Chinese leadership philosophies and corporate culture and subsequently apply this knowledge in their leadership development activities.

When holding the categories up against the views on pedagogical approaches to leadership development described by the headquarters in the previous chapter, three conceptions seemed to primarily be perceived negatively:

1) ‘Aligning to company values’;
2) ‘Learning from China’; and
3) ’Nationality-based’.

In other words, unsuccessful pedagogical approaches to developing leaders in China were perceived as attempts to apply unmodified Western leadership development initiatives in a Chinese context; a lack of learning from Chinese leadership development practices; and not portraying a genuine interest in wanting to invest in local talents.

6.4 Suggestions for Future Improvements of Leadership Development in China

In addition to the abovementioned views, the interviewees provided a number of recommendations for future improvements of the approaches to leadership development in China. As opposed to the previous sections, these suggestions were not sufficiently consistent to be divided into categories. Whilst some interviewees did not express any ideas for specific changes, other interviewees’ suggestions varied from person to person, and hence were impossible to cluster. Consequently, the criterion for the selection of interview quotes was that they possessed relevance to the views presented in the previous two sections. In total, five suggestions to future improvements were identified.

6.4.1 Increased Understanding of Chinese Logic

The first recommendation was related to the category of quotations describing unsuccessful leadership development as a ‘lack of cultural understanding’. This recommendation specifically highlighted the need for an increased understanding of Chinese logical reasoning to increase the quality of cross-cultural leadership development in China:

> '(…) if they want to develop leaders more successfully, they should deepen their understanding of how Chinese leaders are thinking. Our mindset is totally different from the Western one. In China, we study a lot of Western logic. For instance, we do the GMAT test. In many ways we try to understand and to learn from Western logic, which seems to be very different. A typical example is our way of looking at medicine. Your

> logic is that you need to know the basic components of the medicine and what exact diseases it can cure. If you look at Chinese traditional medicine, we just look at your face, the tone of your skin. We might ask about your feelings. It can be hard to distinguish what the different components are, and what exact impact it has on you. Is it very scientific? Definitely not. But this is not how Chinese people are thinking. We don't necessarily dislike transparency, but if you ask a Chinese medic about the technicalities of his medicine, there are plenty of things he doesn't know. He just learned from experience, over 10,000 years of experience that accumulated. It is more holistic and better for things that can't necessarily be directly proven by science. That is why we try to include both things. It is similar with the Chinese government. There are plenty of conflicts related to their leadership that we choose to accept, because it appeals to our logic. The West understands it in a different way because they have a different logic. What is logical to us often is not logical to Westerners. Each of us must learn to understand our differences in logic, backgrounds for our logical reasoning, how we are think about leadership if we want to develop leaders across cultures successfully' (Xiong Wang, Bank Co, HPE).

This interviewee stressed that understanding Chinese logical reasoning is an important component for succeeding in developing leaders cross-culturally in China. The interviewee suggested that the difference in logical reasoning is a central barrier for successful leadership development for Western companies in China. It was argued that Western logical reasoning is often linked to sequential, systematic proof, whereas Chinese logical reasoning is often associated with being more holistic and trust-based. A central point of the interviewee was that both sides need to learn from each other's line of reasoning to establish successful leadership development practices cross-culturally. This view has implications for research to help address these issues as well as for leadership development initiatives to integrate attempts to increase the understanding of different types of logical reasoning in China as well as in the West.

6.4.2 Use Comprehensive Road Maps

The second recommendation was made in extension to the earlier categories describing successful leadership development as 'individual development plans' and unsuccessful leadership development as 'unclear criteria for selection'. Whilst these two categories exemplified respectively good and bad experiences with more and less rigorous

individual development plans, the following quotation further suggested improving individual development plans for Western companies to succeed in developing leaders cross-culturally in China:

> 'I think, in terms of developing more and better leaders in China, Toy Co should put more resources into guiding and monitoring individuals' professional development. We could easily provide more comprehensive road maps and a broader picture to help the Chinese leaders develop and get a clear idea of what kind of resources we can leverage and how they can receive them. For many leaders here, getting access to the resources for leadership development is still a big question mark. Personally, I believe such a step is vital and could help guide more local Chinese people in Western companies to grow much faster' (Jian Qiao Jiao, Toy Co, HPE).

This quote illustrated the importance for transparent and rigorous individual development plans when developing leaders in China. This view has implications for the companies when allocating resources for constructing individual development plants and implementing them in daily practice.

6.4.3 Following up on Leadership Development Initiatives

The third recommendation is mainly linked to the category of perceptions describing successful leadership development initiatives in China as 'individual development plans'. Whilst this category respectively described the importance of building a corporate culture that reinforces leadership on the daily job, this recommendation highlights the importance of supporting and following up on leadership development in initiatives in daily work. This interviewee stated:

> 'In order to improve our leadership development approaches in the future, we should have a better focus on following up on the leadership practices after the training courses. People are very busy. So we often spend a few weeks to do the reading, training, and we understand the basic leadership approaches and skills. Maybe we spend 3 days together on a very condensed course, and people share experiences and learn a lot of things. But then afterwards, we try to do some peer coaching, but it doesn't really work because people come from all over China, from Guangzhou in the South, Beijing, and in the West, so we are quite disconnected. So the challenge is how we can keep people in this "learning mode" after the workshops. Converting the knowledge and skills into operation takes a bit of time. It is difficult to make other people part of your own

> experience, it takes a little bit of time and still is the weak link' (Cong Zhi Zhang, Oil Co, HPE).

This quotation highlighted the difficulty and importance of making learning from leadership development programmes 'stick' in daily leadership practice on the job. In particular, the interviewee described the challenge in mixing people from different cities and afterwards making sure that the new knowledge and ideas can be implemented in the participants' respective offices; this interviewee recommended systematic follow-up checks or certain control mechanisms. Thus, this view has implications for HR or another business unit to devote attention for such follow-up sessions to be conducted.

6.4.4 Bringing in Successful Leaders From Other Companies

The fourth recommendation focuses on bringing in senior leaders from different companies to give inspirational speeches. Thus, it mainly related to the category of perceptions describing successful leadership development initiatives in China as 'exposure to senior management'. However, whilst this category focused on exposure to senior management internally in the company, this recommendation suggested bringing in senior management from other successful Chinese companies:

> 'I think the current program is very good already. However, I think it could be powerful to get external people to come and talk about leadership. It could be some people we already know; for example, like the Alibaba CEO, or someone who is an iconic figure in terms of leading a successful business in China. In this way, we could have some external people come in and talk about leadership and really inspire us with their leadership. Even if it isn't perfectly aligned with our style of leadership, it could raise awareness of different ways of leading and give us some fresh perspectives on what leadership is in China and in the West' (Napoleon Wang, Oil Co, HPE).

This interviewee suggested that inviting successful leaders from successful Chinese companies to give speeches would help to motivate and inspire the Chinese leaders. Moreover, it is a central point that such arrangements could raise awareness of how leadership is conceptualised in different places, and which types of controversies that exist between Chinese and Western styles of leading. Such arrangements would have

implications for the time and resources invested in inviting leaders from other companies to make the presentations.

6.4.5 Allowing Opportunities for Chinese Leaders to Prove Their Worth

The final suggestion for changes of leadership development approaches in China concerns increasing the level of trust in Chinese managers. From this view, it was perceived as crucial to show more trust in the Chinese managers, and thus illustrate that the company embraced and believed in them as leaders. In particular, this suggestion implied providing Chinese managers with real-life experiences of leading on the job. Thus, this suggestion overlapped with various aforementioned categories, the most obvious of which is 'lack of investments in top leaders', because the recommendation addressed investing in real-life opportunities for high-potential employees.

> 'They could show more trust in their high-potential employees and give them better opportunities to prove their worth. They should give them the opportunity to lead some projects, as a key coordinator or some special assignments. This would also work to train them up (…) real assignments would be good. If they succeed, they could, for instance, get promoted. But it's important to create some projects and allow them to be a leader in the short-term first. This is about believing in their culture, and allowing them to experience how to be a leader, how to influence others. These opportunities are very important, both to show trust and to develop a platform for them to learn from. Maybe the company can also learn from their ways of solving the problems' (Michelle Li, Oil Co, HPE).

This interviewee highlighted the importance of improving the opportunities for Chinese high-potential leaders by exposing them to real-life leadership situations. A central part of this view was that such opportunities would benefit the Chinese employees as well as the company through learning from the outcome of the situations. Such efforts have implications for the risk of failure associated with allowing different ways of enacting leadership and solving tasks.

6.5 Summary

By reading through the transcripts, I was able to identify five 'categories of descriptions' of positive experiences with leadership development amongst the 24 Chinese managers: (1) 'Exposure to senior management'; (2) 'Rotation schemes'; (3) 'Individual development plans'; (4) 'Mentoring'' and (5) 'Balancing out power relations through teamwork'. When relating this data to the Western headquarters' views on leadership development outlined in the previous chapter, these successfully perceived approaches revolved primarily around the three conceptions of leadership development as: (1) 'Programme and workshop-based'; (2) 'A customised approach'; and (3) 'Embedded in the corporate culture'. In other words, successful pedagogical approaches to developing leaders in China were considered attempts of applying programmes and workshops with opportunities for Chinese leaders to engage with senior management. Moreover, by the use of rotation schemes, individual development plans, and teamwork structures, effective corporate cultures for leadership development were achieved. Finally, customising approaches to a Chinese context, though mentor initiatives, was described as successful attempts for developing leaders in China.

By contrast, the quotations concerning perceived unsuccessful approaches to leadership development in China were grouped into the five categories: (1) 'lack of investments in top leaders'; (2) 'unclear criteria for selection'; (3) 'a lack of purpose'; (4) 'lack of cultural understanding'; and (5) 'Using ABCs'. In relation to the previous chapter, these unsuccessful approaches were connected to the following three conceptions of leadership development as reported by the headquarters: (1) 'aligning to company values'; (2) 'learning from China'; and (3)'nationality-based'. In other words, the unsuccessful pedagogical approaches to developing leaders in China were identified as attempts to apply unmodified Western leadership development initiatives in a Chinese context; a lack of learning from Chinese leadership development practices; and not portraying a genuine interest in wanting to invest in local talents.

Finally, five categories of perspectives on future improvements were reported: (1) 'Increased understanding of Chinese logic'; (2) 'Use comprehensive road maps'; (3) 'Following up on leadership development initiatives; (4) 'Bringing in successful leaders from other companies; and (5) Allowing opportunities for Chinese leaders to prove their worth'. When I held the suggestions for future improvements up against the

headquarters' conceptions of leadership development described in the previous chapter, these suggestions related to the two categories: 'learning from China' and 'embedded in the corporate culture'. In other words, the categories 'learning from China' and 'embedded in the corporate culture' was the areas on which the Chinese managers advised the Western headquarters to place their future focus when developing leaders in China.

CHAPTER 7 – Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Overview

This study investigates why it has proven consistently difficult for Western companies to develop leaders in China. To explore the complexity of the processes of developing leadership cross-culturally in China, three research questions are asked:

1. How do Chinese managers in foreign companies conceptualise effective leadership and leadership development?
2. What views on leadership and pedagogical approaches to leadership development do foreign companies adopt when training leaders in China?
3. To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?

To answer the three research questions, this section discusses the findings detailed in Chapters 4–6 in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2. This is achieved through a chronological discussion of the main themes:

1. Conceptions of leadership amongst Chinese managers
2. Conceptions of leadership development amongst Chinese managers
3. Issues related to leadership and leadership development
4. Leadership in foreign companies
5. Pedagogical approaches to leadership development in foreign companies
6. Successful approaches to leadership development

Finally, implications for practice, limitations, and further research recommendations are presented at the end of the chapter.

7.2 Conceptions of Leadership Amongst Chinese Managers

In Chapter 4, I presented five 'categories of descriptions' of leadership, derived from interviews with Chinese managers. In conceptions 1 and 2, leadership is associated with Chinese and Western practices, respectively. In conceptions 3–5, leadership is conceived of as multifaceted, each category with connections to Chinese and Western styles. In the following section, these five conceptions and their underlying lines of reasoning are discussed.

7.2.1 Leadership in China and the West

7.2.1.1 'Heroic' leadership

In the first conception, 'heroic', the interviewees associated Chinese leadership with an inspirational figure who could motivate and encourage subordinates to work particularly hard to achieve the company's targets. This finding is in line with the paradigm of leadership research labelled, in Chapter 2, 'new leadership' (e.g., Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016). In this leadership paradigm, scholars (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990; Sims & Lorenzi, 1992) recognise the role of a powerful, heroic leader who, through exemplary behaviour, is able to lead and inspire subordinates to deliver beyond contract. For this reason, Sims and Lorenzi (1992) associate the term 'new leader' with the concept of 'transformational leadership'. However, whilst this line of research (e.g., Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016) was based on business samples in American companies, the findings suggest that an apparently similar way of thinking about leadership is identified amongst Chinese managers in their perceptions of leadership in Chinese companies.

7.2.1.2 '360-degree' leadership

The second conception, '360 degree', was proposed by a number of interviewees associating Western business practices with empowering leadership. This description can be traced back to scholarly discussion of 'collective leadership', such as Bolden (2011) and Raelin (2005), who describe working environments in which employees are

expected to enact leadership as a collective endeavour. As described in Chapter 2, research of this leadership paradigm (e.g., Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Gronn, 2000) originally arose in response to the increasing complexity of the labour market in post-industrial conditions which could not be managed by micro-managed top-down structures alone. Many researchers (e.g., Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011; D'innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016) have supported the idea that collective leadership contributes positively to innovation in different industries. This is of interest to the academic field because it suggests that the conception of collective leadership is present amongst Chinese managers working in Western companies and in the way in which they perceive leadership in Western business practices.

7.2.2 Multifaceted Leadership Conceptions

7.2.2.1 'Western and Chinese' leadership

The third conception, 'Western and Chinese', portrays leadership, firstly, as collective. This view is in alignment with scholars of collective leadership (Chreim et al., 2010; D'innocenzo et al., 2016) and is associated with a 'Western style'. These interviewees also emphasise the ability to adjust leadership styles to different contexts. Such a definition of leadership is in line with that described in Chapter 2 as 'contextual leadership' or 'contingency theory'. In this paradigm, researchers (e.g., Hempel & Martinsons, 2009; Reiche et al., 2017) treat leadership as the ability to diagnose different situations and provide more or less structured tasks to subordinates. Finally, these descriptions highlight a need for a strong, heroic leader who can, in critical times, step in and inspire subordinates. This aligns with research on 'new leadership' (Bass & Avolio, 1995; LePine, et al., 2016). Notably, research on 'new leadership' in the West (e.g., Burns, 1978; LePine, et al., 2016) originally emerged as a criticism of the ideas and principles underlying 'contextual' and 'situational' leadership (e.g., Fiedler, 1967; Reiche et al., 2017). Likewise, 'collective leadership' (e.g., D'innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016; Gronn, 2000) arose as a counter reaction to 'new leadership'. In other words, whereas these theories, from a Western academic perspective, are considered to be in direct opposition and mutually exclusive (e.g., see Khurana, 2002; Western, 2013), this study indicates that Chinese managers find them to be compatible

with one conception. The interviewees suggest that this way of conceptualising leadership is a result of having worked in Western companies for many years, whilst being Chinese nationals, hence being inspired by different organisational practices.

7.2.2.2 Heroic leadership with collective support

The interviewees holding the fourth conception, 'heroic leadership with collective support', predominantly adhered to 'heroic leadership'. These quotations highlight the importance of collective leadership. As in previous conceptions, this view combines theoretical perspectives of 'new leadership' (e.g., Antonakis et al., 2003; LePine et al., 2016) and 'collective leadership' (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2007; D'innocenzo et al, 2016), which, as described in Chapter 2, have historically been formulated as opposing and mutually exclusive in Western literature (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990; Gronn, 2000). However, unlike the previous conception, this view of leadership prioritises the paradigm of 'new leadership' above 'collective leadership' in terms of importance.

7.2.2.3 Powerful senior leaders and strong middle managers

The interviewees adhering to the fifth and final conception, 'powerful senior leaders and strong middle managers', in accordance with scholars of 'new leadership' (e.g., Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016), firstly argued that a leader must be inspiring and heroic. Second, they emphasised that a leader should possess personal traits such as emotional stability, openness to experience, self-confidence, conscientiousness, energy, intelligence, and extroversion. Such a view of leadership is in alignment with that labelled, in Chapter 2, 'individual leadership' or 'trait theory' and represented by scholars such as Kets de Vries (1994) and Nichols and Cottrell (2014). Third, this conception favours the paradigm of 'postmodern leadership'. This view was based on the argument that some company leaders are emotionally unstable, thus there is a need for a strong group of middle managers. Notably, scholars working within the paradigm of 'postmodern leadership' (e.g., Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Fairhurst, 2007) directly criticise the heroic leader as responsible for organisational destabilisation. In particular, Khurana (2002) and Podolny et al. (2005), in a backlash against the paradigm of 'new leadership', stress various dangers and limitations of relying on visionaries with charismatic personalities.

According to these studies, heroic leadership should be avoided, replaced by competent managers with change skills. Notably, this study finds that Chinese managers tend to agree with scholars such as Collins (2001) and Khurana (2002) that heroic leadership has a number of disadvantages. However, unlike these scholars, the Chinese managers suggest combining the 'heroic', 'individual', and 'postmodern' leadership paradigms to compensate for the potential weaknesses associated with heroic leadership. Thus, the Chinese managers do not see a fundamental conflict in simultaneously adhering to 'heroic', 'individual', and 'postmodern' leadership paradigms.

7.2.3 Evaluative Descriptions

7.2.3.1 Positive aspects of Chinese leadership

In discussion of the positive aspects of Chinese leadership, the interviewees reported appreciation of the effectiveness and discipline associated with Chinese leaders. In particular, positive aspects were noted in the way in which Chinese leaders made quick decisions and, through visionary leadership styles, ensured the entire company was working towards shared targets. Such leadership has been researched under the paradigms of 'individual leadership' (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014) and 'new leadership' (LePine et al., 2016).

7.2.3.2 Positive aspects of Western leadership

However, the interviewees also appreciated the freedom and innovative working climates associated with Western leadership. In particular, the benefits of knowledge-sharing and creative thinking were highlighted. Such leadership has been researched under the paradigms of 'collective leadership' (D'innocenzo et al., 2016) and 'postmodern leadership' (Fairhurst, 2007). However, whilst these Western studies have treated these as opposing paradigms, this study contributes to the field by suggesting that Chinese managers are influenced by both Western and Chinese leadership styles in their conceptualisations of leadership.

7.2.4 Western Versus Chinese Logic

The complexity of the leadership conceptions was further explored using the 'Ranking of Statements' interview tool (see Appendix 'B3'). As shown in Table 4.3, 12 of 21 interviewees agreed with all of the six leadership paradigms to which they were exposed during the interviews. Notably, the paradigms in the Western context were originally considered oppositions. For example, Khurana (2002) states that a 'postmodern' scholar is in direct opposition to researchers of 'new leadership'. In other words, Khurana (2002) advocates for postmodern leadership and directly discourages the practice of its opposing paradigm(s).

7.2.4.1 Holistic thinking: connections to Daoism

It is interesting to further reflect upon the reasons why the Chinese managers tended to agree with all six paradigms. Bai and Morris (2014) describe Daoist philosophy as the fundamental assumption that everything in the universe comprises two co-existing and opposing forces. Additionally, Davis (2004) and Hennig (2017) suggest that harmony is achieved by the interplay between opposing forces (the *yin* and *yang*) through cyclic processes of eternal change. In terms of logical reasoning, adhering to a Daoist philosophical standpoint thus has the consequence for the management of paradoxes that both opposites constituting the paradox may in fact be considered true (Davis, 2004). The category 'agreeing with all paradigms' is thus in line with a Daoist view. This tendency is clearly highlighted by Jensen (1992), who states that in Daoist philosophy concepts that may, at a first glance, from a Western perspective, seem contradictory may in fact not be so at all, but rather interdependent polarities that bring existence into being. Chen and Lee (2008) similarly describe Western logical reasoning as 'analytical thinking'. Through this 'analytical logic', opposites are considered as incompatible and mutually exclusive. Hence, for instance, a person who is successful cannot be unsuccessful; a person who is poor cannot be rich; leadership which is heroic cannot be collective, and so on. By contrast, the authors claim, Daoist 'yin-yang reasoning' involves a more holistic idea of harmonious co-existence of opposites in its fundamental logical reasoning (Chen & Lee, 2008).

Thus, it may be the case that the majority of Chinese managers tended to agree with all six leadership paradigms as an expression of the different cultures attaching different

values to different concepts. The expectations for, for example, a caring leader, are conceptualised differently by different people and cultures. From this data, there appears to be an alignment between the way in which the majority of Chinese managers conceptualise leadership and the fundamental pillars of Daoist philosophy (Chen & Lee, 2008).

7.2.4.2 Contrasting paradigms

Another group of participants tended to contrast hierarchical and collective types of leadership (see Table 4.3). Although the preference for leadership paradigm differed between the interviewees, the tendency to contrast the different leadership paradigms was in line with the logical reasoning of Western scholars such as Khurana (2002) and LePine, Zhang, Crawford, and Rich (2016), who similarly formulated their leadership philosophies in direct contrast to others. Khurana (2002), for example, advocated for establishing strong middle managers to prevent domination by heroic leaders. LePine, Zhang, Crawford, and Rich (2016) indicate a similar way of contrasting leadership paradigms by arguing that charismatic leaders lead to a higher performance gains than leaders distributing responsibility and power.

7.2.5 Summary

The interviewees in this chapter associate leadership in Chinese companies primarily with the paradigm of 'new leadership', as represented by researchers such as LePine et al. (2016) and Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003). In contrast, leadership in Western companies is predominantly associated with the paradigm of 'collective leadership', which can be traced back to the work of scholars such as D'innocenzo et al. (2016) and Davis and Eisenhardt (2011). In the final three conceptions, the Chinese managers offer views inspired by a mixture of Western and Chinese leadership practices, as discussed and analysed with reference to a combination of different theoretical leadership paradigms.

When asked whether they tended to agree or disagree with the six leadership paradigms, the majority of the Chinese high-potential employees agreed with all streams. This

contradicts scholars of Western leadership, such as Khurana (2002) and LePine et al. (2016), and is rather associated with a holistic way of thinking and connections to the fundamental ideas of Daoism (Davis, 2004; Hennig, 2017).

7.3 Conceptions of Leadership Development Amongst Chinese Managers

In Chapter 4, the Chinese high-potential employees' perceptions of leadership development were organised into five categories of descriptions. In conceptions 1–3, the most important accelerator for leadership development is highlighted as social processes in daily work. In conceptions 4–5, leadership development is perceived as an individual process emphasising formal training or the personal characteristics of the leader in question. In the following section, these five conceptions are discussed.

7.3.1 Social Perspectives of Leadership Development

7.3.1.1 'Dyadic' leadership development

The first view describes leadership development as 'dyadic', in line with the work of Day and Dragoni (2015) and Uhl-Bien (2006), who similarly portrayed leadership development as occurring in the day-to-day relationships of leaders and their subordinates. These scholars similarly argue that leadership development depends on the type of relationship between the leader and the follower.

This view fits well with the fundamental principles of Confucianism. Hennig (2017), for instance, describes employees in Confucian working environments as inherently part of a social fabric, allowing a morally superior person, referred to as *Junzi* 君子 (Romar, 2002), to guide and support subordinates to act in line with company values. Whilst Confucianism is generally organised with a clear hierarchical structure, Herrmann-Pillath (2015) argues that this does not necessarily contradict individual autonomy. This view emphasises a 'two way' relationship, where the follower must learn to share his or her opinion, which is thus in alignment with Confucian principles. Moreover, this is consistent with the work of Robertson, Olson, Gilley, and Bao (2008), who stress that

Confucianism fosters the tendencies of hierarchy and collectivism and what Ip (2009) defines as 'familial collectivism' (Ip, 2009, p. 465).

7.3.1.2 'Team-based' leadership development

The second view aligns with those of scholars of team-based leadership development (e.g., Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). The respondents highlighted a team-based type of leadership development aimed at sharing leadership more equally amongst team members. In particular, the interviewees stressed the importance of making Chinese leaders feel psychologically safe and comfortable voicing their views and claiming their leadership identities, which is also a central issue for Carson et al. (2007) and Edmondson and Lei (2014). Notably, these quotes reflect the fundamental principles of Daoist philosophy. The desire to encourage employees with different knowledge to become constructive parts of the company's energy in many ways resembles what Davis (2004) describes as the leadership *ch'i* that flows through the network of the organisation. In particular, the way in which the interview quotes suggest that leadership is developed by softness, empowerment, and teamwork to foster a positive atmosphere resembles the idea of *wu wei* 无为 ('leading from below') (Hennig, 2017). This finding is particularly interesting as it supports criticisms of modern Chinese leadership research for connecting the leadership culture to Confucianism alone (Herrmann-Pillath, 2015; Xing & Sims, 2012). By contrast, this study suggests a more complex view of Chinese leadership, highlighting the influence of Daoism on Chinese conceptualisation of leadership development.

The third view, 'building relationships', describes leadership development as occurring through relationships in networks. Whilst this view is somewhat consistent with the conception of leadership development as 'dyadic', it differs on one central point. Rather than learning taking place in the relationship between leader and follower, this conception is centred on the establishment of friendships in complex networks, internal and external to the organisation. This description of leadership development is thus better understood as 'guanxi' (Chen & Lee, 2008b; Hennig, 2017). Wood, Whiteley, and Zhang (2001) describe guanxi as friendship with the implications of a continual exchange of favours. The interviewees associated this type of leadership development with the practices of Chinese companies, which supports Yeung and Tung (1996), who similarly found guanxi to be present in Chinese companies.

7.3.2 Individual Perspectives on Leadership Development

7.3.2.1 Acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies

The fourth conception, 'acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies', is in alignment with studies on 'leader development' (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012; Dragoni et al., 2011). The interviewees mentioned a stream of activities they found beneficial for developing the strategic thinking, communication skills, and functional skills required to become successful leaders in their respective jobs. In accordance with Dragoni et al. (2014) and Gupta and Govindarajan (2002), global work experience was perceived by the Chinese managers to be particularly helpful for developing the strategic thinking and organisational overview needed to maintain a senior management role.

7.3.2.2 Nationality- and gender-based leadership development

The fifth and final view, describing leadership development as 'nationality and gender-based', is somewhat in alignment with work on leader identity (e.g., Day & Sin, 2011; Komives et al., 2005). In agreement with this work, this view considers the role of identity in the development of leadership. However, in contrast to these studies, the interview quotes in this category all concern fixed identities, such as nationality and gender. As noted by DeRue and Ashford (2010), such an approach to leadership development can produce either a positive or a negative spiral, which is likely to affect willingness to participate in leadership development processes, depending on whether the person in question possesses the characteristics that the company rewards.

Whilst some interviewees reported a particular lack of opportunities for Chinese nationals to develop as leaders, others perceived employees of Chinese origin to have very good opportunities. Additionally, it was highlighted that Western companies provided particularly good opportunities for female leaders in China, and Chinese companies less so. It would be interesting to explore further whether there exists a strategic rationale for Western companies to provide either better or worse leadership development conditions for certain nationalities or genders in China, or whether this is an unintended consequence of the leadership development practices in China.

7.3.3 Evaluative Perspectives on Leadership Development

7.3.3.1 Positive descriptions

When describing the positive aspects of Western leadership development, the interviewees reported their appreciation of the rigorous opportunities for training. These opportunities include, for instance, training on skills related to communication, change management, leadership, and dealing with stress. Such an approach to leadership development has been researched under the heading of 'acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies' (Dragoni et al., 2014; McCall, 2010), that similarly suggested for formal training on knowledge, skills, and competencies to have a positive influence on the development of leaders in a Western context. Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that women in particular have more opportunities for training initiatives in Western companies than they do in Chinese companies, which relates to the conception of 'nationality and gender-based' leadership.

7.3.3.2 Negative descriptions

The negative views of Western leadership development firstly concerned failure to sufficiently communicate what is expected of leaders in their daily work. As this lack of information is caused by miscommunication between bosses and subordinates, this tendency is associated with a type of leadership development labelled 'dyadic' (Day and Dragoni, 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Moreover, some interviewees reported that possibilities for on-the-job training, such as rotation schemes, have in recent years seen greater improvement in Chinese companies than Western. From this perspective, Chinese companies have in recent years exceeded their Western counterparts in developing what is labelled 'knowledge, skills, and competencies'. In accordance with Dragoni et al. (2014), such work experiences are important for the development of strategic thinking, especially when exposed to working cultures different to the leader's own. Consequently, it is interesting to note that Chinese companies have been perceived, in recent years, as better than their Western competitors at providing formal leadership training programmes.

7.3.4 Summary

Overall, the interviewees in this part of the study conceptualised leadership development as two types of process: social and individual. 'Social processes' encompasses the categories of 'dyadic', 'team-based', and 'building relationships', from which connections were drawn to Confucianism, Daoism, and guanxi (Confucianism), respectively. The 'individual processes' of leadership development included the categories 'acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies' and 'nationality and gender-based'.

Notably, these findings indicate that leadership development initiatives related to 'acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies' (Dragoni et al., 2014; McCall, 2010) and which are 'nationality and gender-based' (Day & Sin, 2011; Komives et al., 2005) were perceived positively by the Chinese managers. However, concerning initiatives related to 'dyadic' leadership development, the Western companies were seen to be lacking in their practices. Finally, in areas of 'acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies', such as rotation schemes, Chinese companies were perceived as, in recent years, having become better than their Western competitors at providing formal leadership training programmes.

7.4 Issues related to leadership and leadership development

Finally, two categories were related to leadership and leadership development: 'showing care' and guanxi.

7.4.1 Showing Care

The concept of showing care was perceived differently in Chinese and Western companies, both when enacting leadership and during leadership development.

7.4.1.1 Connections to Daoism

Whilst leadership and leadership development in general were perceived as more hierarchical in Chinese companies, the descriptions of care presented the relationship

between leader and follower as more genuine, personal, polite, warm-hearted, and family-like. Such a description was in accordance with the views of Gerstner (2011) and Lin and colleagues (2013), who define *wu wei* 无为 from within Daoism as similarly emphasising a calm and caring atmosphere in which employees feel safe and supported and leaders do not claim credit for their actions.

7.4.1.2 Connections to Confucianism

A leadership that is simultaneously hierarchical and caring is defined in the reciprocal and interdependent social contract of power that has emerged in studies of Confucianism (e.g., Chu & Ju, 1993; Xin & Pearce, 1996). Robertson et al. (2008), for instance, describe Confucianism as fostering the tendencies of hierarchy and collectivism, pinpointing that social harmony can only be achieved when authority is truly respected and acknowledged by followers. This dialectical notion of leadership and leadership development as both dominant and caring is captured by the two major Confucian principles of *wu lun* 五伦 and *wu chang* 五常 (Wang et al., 2012, p. 509). The 'five cardinal relationships' of *Wu lun* relate to a paternalistic and hierarchical relationship, while the 'five constants' of *Wu chang* are elements of humaneness, benevolence, and trust. As in the quotes describing care within leadership and leadership development, the underlying idea of Confucianism is similar to that which Ip (2009) describes as 'familial collectivism'.

7.4.1.3 Connections to legalism

However, these descriptions of care must not be taken to suggest that Chinese leadership and leadership development does not apply strict consequences to actions, such as praise and punishment. On the contrary, the interviewees emphasised common usage of punishments, such as heavy bonus cuts, for example. These leadership practices are in alignment with work on 'legalism' (Hwang, 2008; Ma & Tsui, 2015). As also highlighted by these interview quotes, legalism scholars (Liao, 1959; Watson, 1913) note different methods of reward and punishment used by top leaders in China to maintain control. Monitoring, micro-management, and punishment have long been considered useful tools for reliably implementing laws and reaching strategic goals (ibid.). It is interesting to find in this study that, whilst the concept of care in Chinese

companies is in many ways aligned with Confucian philosophy, there are also evident connections to legalism.

7.4.1.4 Care in Western companies

In Western companies, by contrast, the concept of care is perceived as support for employees, predominantly through professional relationships. This finding is in line with the studies of Chen and Lee (2008) and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004), who argue that Chinese humanist management philosophy generally emphasises human-heartedness (*rén* 仁) in the employee's relationships with fellow beings. Western humanist management philosophy has, to a greater extent, tended to focus on autonomy, agency, and the rights of individual employees. It is thus interesting to note that the different ways of conceptualising care within leadership and leadership development in Western and Chinese companies are in alignment with broader philosophies.

This study indicates that different cultural understandings of care may lead Chinese employees to believe their bosses in Western organisations do not care about them, and consequently leave them feeling unvalued. This is an important finding because this misunderstanding reduces motivation and confidence amongst the Chinese leaders', inhibiting them in their daily professional practice and development.

7.4.2 Guanxi

The second category related to leadership and leadership development in China is guanxi or 'relationships'. This finding is consistent with those of Chen and Lee (2008b) and Hennig (2017), who describe this as a reciprocal and interdependent social contract: not simply a relationship between the leader and follower, but rather a comprehensive network of contacts, either beneficial or harmful to the operation of a firm or an individual. This structure of business practice has been associated, by various scholars, with the *wu lun* 五伦 of Confucianism (Chen & Lee, 2008b; Xin & Pearce, 1996). The finding that guanxi is perceived as an important aspect of leadership and leadership development practices in China supports the work of Wood, Whiteley, and Zhang (2001) and Yeung and Tung (1996). Additionally, this study finds that Chinese managers working in Western companies tend to project their own experiences of

guanxi into the leadership and leadership development practices of Western companies. Thus, these Chinese managers intuitively expect Westerners to promote Westerners – with whom they have stronger personal relationships, even in situations where this is not the case.

7.4.3 Summary

These perspectives of showing care and guanxi confirm the work of Herrmann-Pillath (2015) and Xing and Sims (2012), who argue that Chinese business culture is too complex to be reduced to a Confucianist analysis alone. This study found connections to Confucianism, Daoism, and legalism, forming a complex mix of Western ideas and concepts regarding leadership and leadership development. In the following section, I will discuss the impact of these analytical points on the perceived success of Chinese managers. However, I will first consider the pedagogical approaches to leadership and leadership development adopted by foreign companies when developing leaders in China.

7.5 Leadership in Western Companies

In Chapter 5, I presented four categories of descriptions of leadership, each derived from interviews with representatives of the Western headquarters. In conceptions 1 and 2, leadership was associated with Chinese practices. In conceptions 3 and 4, more universal descriptions of good leadership practices were reported. In the following section, these views and the underlying reasoning of the conceptualisations are discussed.

7.5.1 Conceptions of Leadership in China

7.5.1.1 Harmony-searching

The first perspective on leadership reported by the headquarters was labelled ‘harmony-searching’. Here, the interviewees described Chinese leaders as less prone to speaking up, engaging in conflict, or delivering negative messages, owing to a desire to maintain

harmony. This view is in line with Lin et al. (2013), who argue that inherent to Confucian philosophy is the drive to establish and maintain harmony in the workplace. Moreover, scholars of Daoism (e.g., Bai & Roberts, 2011; Davis, 2004) suggest that harmony-seeking is a central aspect of Daoist virtue ethics. This supports the study of 'Chinese humanism' by House et al., (2004), which reports that benevolence (*rén* 仁) seems stronger in Chinese leadership than Western.

7.5.1.2 Cultural competence

The second view, leadership as 'cultural competence', is in alignment with contingency scholars' research into contextual leadership (e.g., Hempel & Martinsons, 2009; Reiche et al., 2017). The interviewees argued that it is vital to be a good diagnostician and to adjust leadership styles to the context when enacting leadership cross-culturally. Supporting the work of Hempel and Martinsons (2009), the interviewees reported that cross-cultural leadership practices in China called for special awareness to reach the full potential of the workforce. For instance, they emphasised that knowledge of guanxi is crucial to succeeding as a leader in China. These findings are in alignment with scholars such as Chen and Lee (2008) and Xin and Pearce (1996), who similarly suggest that knowledge of guanxi is paramount when doing business in China. However, no consensus was reached amongst the interviewees as to whether navigating successfully as a leader in a guanxi environment requires being of Chinese origin, or whether this can be learned by any nationality.

7.5.2 General Conceptions of Leadership

7.5.2.1 Heroic

In the third conception, portraying leadership as 'heroic', the interviewees described the leader as an inspirational figure, able to formulate a clear vision and inspire subordinates to deliver results. This finding is similar to the first leadership conception, cited in the previous chapter, and is in line with the leadership paradigm that was labelled, in Chapter 2, 'new leadership' (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Bass, 1985). However, whilst heroic leadership was mainly associated with Chinese leadership, the interviewees perceived heroic leadership as universally applicable across different countries and cultures.

7.5.2.2 Collective and contextual

In the fourth view, 'collective and contextual', the interviewees described leadership as the ability to empower subordinates and build strong, autonomous teams. The importance of addressing the opportunities and risks associated with different contexts was also mentioned. This idea of collective leadership is consistent with the work of, for example, Bolden (2011) and Davis and Eisenhardt (2011), who similarly stress the need to distribute leadership throughout the organisation to break down silos and achieve the full potential of the workforce. Similarly, the interviewees highlighted the need to build strong teams that can deliver across functions and countries. The need to adjust leadership to different situations and contexts is stressed by studies such as Hempel and Martinsons (2009) and Reiche et al. (2017), who argue that the most prominent task of a leader is to meet the different demands of the situation in which they are operating.

7.5.3 Evaluative descriptions

7.5.3.1 Positive descriptions of Chinese leadership

In the evaluative descriptions, the headquarters reported that Chinese leaders have a particularly strong interest in learning and understanding Western ways of leading. These findings support those of Goodall and Warner (2010) and Goodall, Warner, and Lang (2004), which outline how Chinese government officials, academics, and business people have, since the Cultural Revolution, demonstrated an increasing interest in Western business management and leadership practices, albeit with 'Chinese characteristics'. Moreover, the description of Chinese employees as particularly disciplined is somewhat similar to that presented in legalism studies (e.g., Hue, 2007; Ma & Tsui, 2015). These scholars argue that notions of *Fa* 法 ('law' or 'regulations and policies'), *Shu* 術 ('implementing, controlling, and monitoring'), *Shi* 勢 ('retaining power') have affected modern Chinese employees' constructs of discipline and their ideas about the social settings of management and leadership. The strict discipline embedded in legalism thus resembles the image presented by the interviewees in this chapter to describe Chinese leaders' high levels of interest in living up to what is expected of them.

Additionally, to some extent, the high level of discipline corresponds with Confucian leadership philosophy. In particular, the term 'familial collectivism' is embedded in Confucianism (Ip, 2009, p. 465), stressing devotion to a leader by his or her followers (Ip, 2009). It is a central finding of this study that the combination of strict discipline (seen in legalism) and devotion (described in Confucianism) are central contributors to Chinese employees being perceived as dedicated and loyal by Western interviewees.

7.5.3.2 Negative descriptions of Chinese leadership

The negative perceptions of Chinese leadership concern a 'lack of leadership capacity' when there is a need to engage in conflict or voice opinions. This description is in alignment with the harmony-searching described above. This leadership style is problematic as difficult messages are often not delivered (or delivered in private, which is time-consuming) and important information is lost. A key finding of this study is that that previously referred to as a Confucian prescription for obtaining and maintaining harmony (Lin et al., 2013), and the Daoist virtue ethics of seeing harmony (Bai & Roberts, 2011), are perceived by Western headquarters as weaknesses and as a central obstacle to Chinese leaders taking on strategic management roles. In other words, the Chinese humanism and benevolent leadership agency described by Wei-Ming (1998) and House et al. (2004), which these studies describe as acknowledged and appreciated in Chinese management contexts, is perceived as a lack of capability for leadership in Western companies.

Giles (2008) argues that the moral character incorporated into Chinese leadership generally focuses on self-transformation as a prerequisite of organisational transformation. In other words, Giles (2008) states that whilst Western transformational leadership theories generally emphasise a leader's ability to engage with followers and transform their self-interest to the collective interest of the organisation (e.g., Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), Chinese business environments are balanced by the high moral standards set by the most senior leader, with less focus on confrontational relationships between middle managers. Thus, the findings in this category indicate that the perception of Chinese managers as unable to 'engage in conflict' might reflect a set of culturally conditioned assumptions concerning how to think about leadership, as well as

the type of leadership considered appropriate in a Chinese context (Chen & Lee, 2008; Hennig, 2017).

7.5.4 Logical Reasoning Underlying the Conceptions

As shown in Table 5.3, only two interviewees reported agreement with all six leadership paradigms. In line with the Chinese managers interviewed in Chapter 4, these two interviewees highlighted the positive aspects of all six leadership paradigms. As I argued in Chapter 4, such a view mirrors Daoism, which, according to Davis (2004) and Jensen (1992), emphasises a holistic view of the harmonious co-existence of opposites. Consequently, it is interesting to note that the only two interviewees holding this view were both of Chinese origin and, moreover, considered themselves relatively isolated from the Western headquarters due to the companies' large sizes and the lack of communication between the headquarters and the Chinese organisations. Whilst these employees were expected to represent the companies' official values and beliefs, both stated that they were uncertain of these and instead presented views on leadership based on their own experiences of working for the company. The Daoist view of leadership may thus reflect the reality that these Chinese interviewees had had only limited contact with the headquarters and were thus less influenced by what Chen and Lee (2008) describe as Western 'selective logic'.

The remaining five interviewees spoke on behalf of their respective companies, making a common distinction between hierarchical and democratic leadership. These companies associated their leadership cultures with either a hierarchical or a democratic type of structure, which supports the argument that Western logical reasoning – in contrast to Chinese logical reasoning – is analytical and selective in its nature (Chen & Lee, 2008; Jensen,1992). Notably, all interviewees of Western origin reported an incompatible distinction between hierarchical and democratic leadership. Moreover, they considered this perspective to be a prerequisite of functioning as a leader in the company culture. In other words: according to these interviewees, to be a successful leader, employees must have an understanding of leadership that is somewhat consistent with the one driving the company. The fact that the majority of Chinese managers agreed with all six leadership paradigms was thus considered a central obstacle to their professional development.

7.5.5 Summary

The interviewees from the companies' headquarters highlighted four conceptions of leadership. These categories are descriptions of leadership in different situations. Whilst the first (*harmony-searching*) is a perception of how Chinese leaders behave in the respective companies, the category of cultural competence relates to the requirements for foreign companies enacting leadership in China. The category *heroic* is a more general description of the personality that a good leader should possess, whereas *collaborative and contextual* portrayed an ideal type of leadership required internationally throughout the company. The categories are thus not necessarily an expression of the companies' fixed definitions of good leadership, but rather a response to the current challenges they are facing in different situations.

In the positive evaluative descriptions of these conceptions, Chinese leaders were said to have high levels of discipline and dedication. This was connected to legalism and Confucianism. In the negative descriptions, Chinese leaders were perceived as lacking the ability to engage in conflict or speak their minds, which was associated by the Western headquarters with weakness and indecision. This study finds that the perception of Chinese managers as unable to 'engage in conflict' is linked to Daoist ethics and thus reflects a set of culturally conditioned assumptions concerning leadership in a Chinese context.

When ranking the paradigms, interviewees of Western origin reported an incompatible distinction between hierarchical and democratic leadership. Moreover, they described this view as a general requirement for success in the respective companies. The majority of the Chinese managers in the previous chapter tended to agree with all paradigms, which was considered a central obstacle to their development.

7.6 Pedagogical approaches to leadership development in foreign companies

In Chapter 5, the Western headquarters' perceptions of leadership development were divided into six categories of descriptions. In conceptions 1–3, leadership development was generally described by a globally unified approach, with no modifications to the

Chinese context reported. By contrast, conceptions 4–6 concerned leadership development specifically in a Chinese context. In the following section, the six conceptions are discussed.

7.6.1 Universal Approaches

7.6.1.1 Corporate culture

The first view, 'embedded in the corporate culture', is an acknowledgement of leadership being developed through social interaction on the job. Leadership is thus a phenomenon which cannot be fully developed by study and workshops. This view is consistent with the Day and Dragoni (2015) definition of 'leader*ship* development', as opposed to what they define as 'leader development'. Moreover, McCauley, Van Velsor, and Ruderman (2010) describe this view as a process of social influence concerning the ability to engage in leadership. In this category, some interviewees reported a hierarchical approach to leadership development, which aligns with studies of 'dyadic' leadership development (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012; Ilies et al., 2007). Others described a 'team-based' style of leadership development, in line with studies such as Aime et al. (2014) and DeRue (2011). While the first view is closely related to the hierarchical collectivism described in Confucianist leadership studies (e.g., Herrmann-Pillath, 2015; Robertson et al., 2008), the second is somewhat similar to the principles of 'non-action' and 'leading from below' (*wu wei* 无为) portrayed in Daoist leadership studies (e.g., Cheung & Chan, 2008; Hennig, 2017).

7.6.1.2 Programme and workshop-based

The second view, 'programme and workshop-based', is aligned with various studies of 'leader development' (e.g., Arvey et al., 2007; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). In this category, it was reported that certain leadership workshops and programmes are perceived to more effectively develop leaders in China. These interviewees highlighted programmes that stimulate academic knowledge and capabilities related to coaching, delivering key messages effectively, and speaking up. As supported by Leary and Tangney (2003) and Day et al. (2009), these programmes target participants' self-efficacy, self-awareness, and leader identity using exercises of self-reflection and role-plays.

Additionally, another central purpose of the programmes was to set up opportunities to network and thus encourage spontaneous collaboration across the organisation in China and internationally. As in the studies of Dragoni et al (2014) and Dragoni et al. (2011), the interviewees reported that such experiences stimulate knowledge, skills, and competencies in direction-setting, relationship-building, change-management, and external environmental navigation. Finally, the interviewees pointed out the importance of incorporating possibilities for global exposure into the programmes. This supports the findings of Dragoni et al. (2014) and Dragoni et al. (2011), who cite global leadership development experiences as effective means of stimulating the cognitive abilities of leaders and their ability to think strategically.

7.6.1.3 Global values

In the third view, 'aligning to global values', leadership development is perceived as universally designed by the headquarters and subsequently exported to country offices around the world. Leadership development is thus a one-way process in which all countries and cultures are treated similarly. This view fundamentally contradicts that of Ibarra et al. (2014), which suggests leadership identities are unidimensional and defined by social roles and contextual factors. According to this study, leader identity is formed through social interaction via the personal characteristics attributed to them by colleagues. Lord and Hall (2005) argue that leader identity is a particularly important component of the leadership development process, increasing motivation for the acquisition of new leadership skills and further identity development.

Attempting to standardise leader identities across different social and cultural contexts may result in what DeRue and Ashford (2010) describe as a 'negative spiral', which ultimately decreases willingness to participate effectively in leadership processes when needed. Moreover, Hempel and Martinsons (2009) argue that implementing change initiatives (such as leadership development programmes) with value incongruities in different country offices of multinational companies results in considerable resistance to implementation, particularly when working cross-culturally in China. By contrast, this view of leadership is consistent with the fundamental notion of legalism (Hwang, 2008; Ma and Tsui, 2015), in which scholars propose, in congruence with this category, applying strict and rigorous control during leadership initiatives.

7.6.2 Approaches Targeted Especially to China

7.6.2.1 Customised

The fourth category portrays leadership development as 'a customised approach' and is thus very different to the previous. The interviewees in this category encouraged the customisation of leadership initiatives to the Chinese context, thus embracing the diversity of the Chinese managers. Such a perspective is in accordance with that of scholars who propose a contextual approach (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Hempel & Martinsons, 2009). Thus, the development of leaders is likely to qualitatively differ across country offices and functions, aligning with the views of the interviewees here. Moreover, the idea of allowing a certain amount of customisation within leadership development initiatives in cross-cultural leadership development is somewhat aligned with the views Confucianism shared by Herrmann-Pillath (2015) and Ip (2009). These authors note that Confucianism emphasises individual autonomy within a system of hierarchical structures. Consequently, slight customisation of leadership development programmes, allowing the Chinese organisation a degree of autonomy, mirrors this Confucian ideal.

7.6.2.2 Learning from China

The interviewees here went one step further and highlighted areas in which the West could learn from China in its leadership development practices. This is fundamentally in agreement with the views of Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) and Day, Gronn, and Salas (2004), who researched leadership development as equally shared by teams and organisations. These scholars support distributed leadership development and the use of information exchange to expand collective efficacy. In such a view, the Chinese organisation is considered to have the potential to develop and share valuable information on leadership development with the headquarters. Furthermore, Aime et al. (2014) stresses that organisations are more inclined to share power when their members are knowledgeable about each other's expertise. Consequently, to enhance the conditions for sharing information between the headquarters and the Chinese organisation, it is paramount that the two organisations are knowledgeable concerning one another's expertise.

This view of leadership development is in alignment with the Daoist concept of *wu wei* (无为), which Hennig (2017) translates as 'non-action' or 'leading from below'. As highlighted by Cheung and Chan (2008), the concept of *wu wei* reflects a central component of the philosophy of Daoism. It opposes strict top-down control and instead seeks empowerment without constant prompting and interference. The interviewees here suggested a productive atmosphere and information exchanges, not simply from the headquarters to the Chinese organisation, but also vice versa. This mutual exchange of knowledge may be compared to what Davis (2004) describes as 'leadership *ch'i*', which follows the paths or circuits between the company's different organisations, through its networks and channels, without any blockages. This free flow of global knowledge exchange, in which employees from different cultures enjoy a certain amount of freedom in an atmosphere of cooperation, equality, and harmony is similar to the Hennig (2017) description of Daoism.

7.6.2.3 Nationality-based

In the sixth conception, 'nationality-based', the interviewees emphasised the effect of the managers' nationality on the possibilities for leadership development in China. Whilst some interviewees considered it particularly beneficial to be of Chinese nationality, others described a 'glass ceiling' for managers of Chinese origin. Studies of leader identity, such as those of Lord and Hall (2005) and Day and Sin (2011), have shown that leader identities are constructed positively and negatively in different social contexts, but these interviewees focussed on a fixed trait (nationality). However, when elaborating on the reason for this 'glass ceiling', various interviewees associated Chinese managers with a lack of global exposure. This view aligns with existing leader development works, such as that of Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) and Gupta and Govindarajan (2002), which similarly argues that global exposure is positively related to managers' global orientation, tolerance for ambiguity, cultural flexibility, and strategic thinking, and thus their ability to take on strategic leadership positions.

In contrast, other interviewees described 'being Chinese' as an effective driver of professional development due to the companies' increasing interest in better understanding Chinese stakeholders. The benefit of being Chinese when working in China is noted in studies of guanxi, such as those of Chen and Lee (2008b) and Xin and Pearce (1996). These scholars similarly emphasise the advantage of being Chinese when

navigating complex *guanxi* networks, noting that succeeding or failing in such attempts can be either beneficial or harmful to the operation of a firm. As guanxi operations can easily become a breeding ground for nepotism and factionalism in an institution (Wood et al., 2001; Putnam, 2003), the interviewees defined 'being Chinese' as a significant benefit for understanding and navigating the power relations and sanctions employed in these structural and formal business practices.

7.6.3 Summary

Overall, the interviewees in this part of the study conceptualised leadership development in two ways: universal processes and approaches targeted to China. The 'universal processes' of leadership development encompass the categories of 'corporate culture, 'programme and workshop-based', and 'global values', from which connections were drawn to Confucianism, Daoism, and legalism. The leadership development 'approaches targeted to China' include the categories of 'customised', 'learning from China', and 'nationality-based'. Here references can be drawn to Confucianism and the Daoist concept of *wu wei* (无为). Thus, it is possible to identify connections to Chinese philosophy in both the 'universal processes' and the 'approaches targeted especially to China'. However, it remains to be investigated the extent to which the two approaches to leadership development are perceived as successful by the participants. This will be discussed in the following section.

7.7 Successful approaches to leadership development

In this section, I discuss the findings linked to research question (3) (*To what extent are the different approaches to developing leadership perceived as successful by the participants?*) in light of the research presented in Chapter 2. I reflect upon the Chinese managers' perceptions of both successful and unsuccessful leadership development initiatives.

7.7.1 Perceived successful leadership development approaches

7.7.1.1 Exposure to senior management

The first category of leadership development initiatives perceived as successful is named 'exposure to senior management'. The quotations here support the findings of Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014), in the sense that these likewise stress the importance of employees transcending national boundaries for development as leaders. Day and Dragoni (2015) stress the need for future research to untangle when such experiences are reinforcing versus when they disrupt current routines. Notably, this study finds that the experience of presenting solutions to real business problems to members of the (Western) senior management team is perceived as particularly reinforcing by the Chinese managers. Moreover, the Chinese managers' appreciation of recognition by Western senior management aligns with the Confucian principle of *wu lun* 五伦 and the 'five cardinal relationships' that similarly highlight the importance of the superior's recognition of the subordinate (Ip, 2009; Wang, Tee, & Ahmed, 2012). In Confucianism, the superior is referred to as *Junzi* 君子, an idea of personhood which invites continual assessment of subordinates and has the power to cultivate people and contribute to societal moral transformation (Song & Jiao, 2018).

7.7.1.2 Rotation

The second category, 'rotation schemes', is reflected in studies of leader development (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014) that similarly find accumulated work experience in different functions and country offices to be an important part of senior leader development. However, as opposed to the previous category ('exposure to senior management'), this view emphasises empowerment and developing ability to challenge the status quo. This approach is consequently in alignment with the Daoist principle of *wu wei* 无为 ('leading from below') (Hennig, 2017). Furthermore, the fundamental idea of a rotation scheme is to encourage teamwork and spontaneous collaboration by breaking down boundaries between different functions and country offices. This aligns with Daoist business studies (e.g., Cheung & Chan, 2008; Wang, Tee, & Ahmed, 2012). For example, as noted above, Davis (2004) emphasises leadership *ch'i,* which is a type of energy that flows through the network of the organisation and follows the paths or circuits created to channel it.

Rotation schemes can, in this sense, be tools to prevent channels becoming blocked by leadership energy building up on one side of the boundary.

7.7.1.3 Individual development plans

The third category, 'individual development plans', supports studies of self-awareness (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010; Reilly, Dominick, & Gabriel, 2014). In line with these studies, the interviewees here highlighted initiatives such as tailoring their CVs, making individual key performance indicators and scorecards, and 360-degree feedback systems aimed to enhance the Chinese leaders' self-awareness (Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010; Seifert & Yukl, 2010). Day and Dragoni (2015) encourage future researchers to explore the effectiveness of multisource feedback. Whilst the evidence of this study is not sufficient to determine whether multi-source feedback actually enhances leaders' self-awareness, it does indicate that Chinese leaders in Western companies have found such initiatives useful. This finding moreover supports the studies of Chen and Lee (2008b) and Giles (2008), who argue that Chinese leadership philosophies generally make the self-transformation of the leader a prerequisite for organisational transformation. This is also a repeated theme in Sun Tzu's '*Art of War',* which suggests that a leader must develop individual morality, knowledge, and strengths before being able to lead others (Gagliardi, 2007).

7.7.1.4 Mentoring

The fourth category, 'mentoring', consists of successful experiences of being mentored on the job. The perception of leadership development as a social process taking place on the job is consistent with studies of dyadic and relational leadership, such as those of Dulebohn et al. (2012) and Uhl-Bien (2006). A fundamental assumption here is that leadership development demands a high quality relationship between leader and subordinate. The idea of developing leaders through mentor/mentee arrangements is again similar to the Confucian concept of *'wu lun*', where a superior person is said to lead subordinates towards morality (company values in this case) and justice. Moreover, the success of the mentor/mentee programmes facilitated by corporate universities supports the findings of Goodall and Warner (2010) and Sham (2007), which similarly suggest an increasing interest in corporate universities amongst Chinese business leaders.

7.7.1.5 Balancing out power relations through teamwork

The fifth and final category of perceived successful leadership development initiatives is labelled 'balancing out power relations through teamwork'. This set of quotations is in alignment with findings of team-based leadership development (e.g., Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). In particular, Carson et al. (2007) and Edmondson and Lei (2014) suggest that the concept of 'psychological safety' could be enhanced through the sharing of power in teams. 'Psychological safety' is referred to as people's perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context, such as a workplace (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Similarly, the interviewees in this study reported that initiatives such as formal turn-taking, small group discussions, and allowing the use of a native language in initial discussions all help Chinese managers gain knowledge of one another's expertise and thus increase psychological safety. In line with Aime et al. (2014), such practices encourage Chinese managers to voice their opinions. The interviewees referred numerous times to the challenge of enabling Chinese leaders to voice their opinions. The tendency of subordinates to feel uncomfortable with speaking up reflects the philosophy of legalism (Hwang, 2009; Ma & Tsui, 2015), which emphasises the need for subordinates to comply with a set of moral values to avoid punishable behaviours and ensure orderly action (ibid.).

7.7.2 Leadership Development Approaches Perceived Unsuccessful

7.7.2.1 Lack of investment

The first category of negatively perceived leadership development initiatives is labelled 'lack of investment in top leaders'. Here, the interviewees reported that after having reached a middle manager position, there was a lack of leadership development initiatives provided by the company. This results in an unfortunate 'glass-ceiling', below which few (or no) financial and time investment was made to develop Chinese leaders into top positions. Casimir and Waldman (2007) argue that high-level and low-level leadership differ in their natures and that different cultures associate different meanings with the job functions. In this light, it is problematic that the Chinese managers are not supported professionally in their transfer to high-level leadership positions. In fact, this

lack of support caused some interviewees to report that the company appeared uninterested in having Chinese leaders in top positions.

7.7.2.2 Unclear criteria for selection

The second category, 'unclear criteria for selection', is somewhat similar to the previous. However, whereas the previous category concerns a lack of development initiatives for Chinese top leaders, these managers described a lack of transparency in terms of what it takes to be chosen for leadership development initiatives. This finding supports those of Wang (2011) and Hempel and Martinsons (2009), who propose that attempts to adopt Western leadership development initiatives in a Chinese context have been found to be ineffective. Such contextual obstacles, the authors argue, occur because specific practices or policies represent very different changes in different cultures. Notably, Hempel and Martinsons (2009) further recommend initiatives in mainland China exhibiting characteristics that reflect prevailing local values.

7.7.2.3 Lack of purpose

In the third category, interviewees reported a lack of meaning or apparent purpose in leadership development initiatives. Examples of initiatives with a weak purpose were programmes introducing the 'company way of leading' without considering the particular context in which the participants were using the techniques and leadership values. Examples of good purposes included training plans designed for the participants' roles, with curricula that are modified and extended annually for the continuous courses. In line with the studies of Wang (2011) and Hempel and Martinsons (2009), the perceived lack of purpose was reported as culturally determined. Chinese managers here did not buy into the Western company culture and did not see any value in the leadership development initiatives. Following DeRue and Ashford (2010), such negative perceptions are likely to affect willingness to participate in leadership processes when needed, resulting in a negative spiral and ultimately being harmful to the organisation.

7.7.2.4 Cultural understanding

The fourth category of negative perceptions is named 'lack of cultural understanding'. These comments are in line with the findings of Aime et al. (2014), who similarly argue that mutual information exchange between country offices is an important determinant of a company's collective leadership efficacy. From a Chinese Daoist philosophical

perspective, these perceptions are particularly harmful for the company's 'leadership *ch'i'* (Davis, 2004; Hennig, 2017). As described in 'learning from China', a lack of understanding of Chinese leadership development practices is considered a blockage in the paths or circuits of the company's mutual exchange of knowledge, and thus is potentially harmful to the company (Hennig, 2017). A blockage in the communication process can cause misunderstandings between country offices.

7.7.2.5 American-born Chinese (ABCs)

The fifth category 'using American-born Chinese (ABCs)[16]' concerns negative experiences with attempting to adopt leaders of Chinese origin who have lived their lives overseas, with a goal of acquiring leaders with both 'Chinese characteristics' and Western mental models. This strategy is perceived as a 'quick fix' or a 'fast track' route of getting Chinese leaders on board and an easy way of breaking the 'glass ceiling', without having to develop Chinese leaders from scratch. The Chinese managers interpreted this approach as reflecting a lack of interest in genuinely understanding Chinese culture. From a Confucian perspective, this approach can be seen as violating the principles of 'loyalty' (*zhong)*, 'respectfulness' (*gong)*, and 'modesty' (*rang)* (Hennig, 2017; Ip, 2009). From a Daoist perspective, using ABCs can be interpreted as a violation of the principle of *wu wei* 无为 ('leading from below') (Davis, 2004) because, for the interviewees, it is perceived as an attempt to impose Western values through a leader with superficially 'Chinese characteristics'.

7.8 Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study has been to understand why it has proven consistently difficult for Western companies to develop local leaders in China (Wang, 2011). The findings have broad implications for human resources professionals, management educators, Chinese managers in Western companies, and the senior management of multinational companies with activities in China.

[16] The term 'ABC' is an abbreviation for 'American Born Chinese', used in this study to describe leaders in Western companies who are of Chinese origin and have spent their lives in the West, not necessarily in the US.

7.8.1 Leadership Conceptions

Various studies (e.g., Casimir & Waldman, 2007; Gerstner & Day, 1994) have suggested that perceptions of leadership are what followers act upon, and consequently, such perceptions affect the outcomes of leadership processes. Notably, this study finds that conceptualisations amongst Chinese managers are multifaceted and inspired by what is conceived of as a combination of 'Chinese' and 'Western' leadership styles. According to the interviewees, this arises as a result of being of Chinese origin and working for a Western company. The first recommendation for practice, in line with Gerstner and Day (1994), consequently concerns alignment of leadership conceptions between the Western headquarters and the Chinese managers. Here, companies essentially encounter two options: embracing differences and aligning conceptions. Whilst this choice depends on various factors, such as the company's global leadership strategy and company structure and culture, this study urges companies in China to work actively and continuously to collect comprehensive data helping to uncover where the differences of leadership conceptions lie between their Western and Chinese organisations. Subsequently, it can be determined to what extent these differences are beneficial or damaging.

Second, whilst Chinese high-potential employees reported appreciation of some aspects of Western leadership culture, such as the freedom to express one's opinions and the friendly, innovative working environments (D'innocenzo et al., 2016), they also value the effectiveness and discipline associated with Chinese leadership (LePine et al., 2016). This study consequently suggests that Western companies in China must either implement aspects of Chinese leadership in their practices or justify to their Chinese managers why other approaches are more suitable to reach the intended outcomes. As this study has indicated, leaders who fail to live up to these targets are perceived as less competent than their Chinese competitors.

Third, the Chinese high-potentials' holistic manner of conceptualising leadership (with reference to multiple styles) is conceived of by the Western headquarters as unfocused and vague. Consequently, Chinese leadership is associated with a lack of ability to engage in conflict, making Chinese people unsuitable for strategic senior roles. Notably, this view differs significantly from the Chinese interviewees' perceptions of Chinese leaders as heroic, visionary, and transformational, in line with LePine et al. (2016). Due

to this misconception, I encourage Western companies to increase their understanding of Chinese leadership to fully grasp the complexity of the behaviour of their Chinese managers. In this study, the philosophies of Confucianism (Lin, Ho, & Lin, 2013; Romar, 2002), Daoism (Bai & Morris, 2014; Davis, 2004), and legalism (Hwang, 2008; Ma & Tsui, 2015) have been seen to play central roles in how modern Chinese business people enact and think about leadership. Supporting Hempel and Martinsons (2009), I consequently argue that a lack of understanding of these philosophical stances could be a major hindrance to the development of Chinese leaders. One specific recommendation highlighted in this study for increasing understanding of Chinese leadership agency concerns inviting guest speakers from successful Chinese companies to share their mental models and stories of how they managed to succeed as leaders, both in China and globally.

In summary, this study recommends that multinational companies in China integrate into their China strategy the need for mutual understanding between Chinese high-potential managers and headquarters, specifically concerning how effective leadership is conceptualised and the reasoning and justification for the different views. Important knowledge is being lost in the cross-cultural collaborations explored in this study, and both sides could learn from the other's perceptions of effective leadership. The 'leadership paradigm framework' (see Appendix 'B3') of this dissertation is proposed as a tool for opening up comprehensive and inclusive conversations as to how leadership can be conceptualised.

7.8.2 Leadership Development

7.8.2.1 Learning from successful practices

The interviewees representing the Western companies' headquarters reported six different views of leadership development. Those approaches perceived as successful by the Chinese managers are as follows: 1) programme and workshop-based initiatives, 2) customised approaches, and 3) initiatives embedded in the corporate culture. Based on this finding, this study makes the following recommendations:

1) Initiatives granting selected Chinese high-potential managers exposure to senior management. In line with Day and Dragoni (2015), these initiatives would

include workshops in which the managers are asked to solve relevant business cases and potential solutions current business problems.

2) Rotation schemes that provide selected Chinese high-potential managers with the opportunity to accumulate work experience in different functions and country offices (Day, et al., 2014)
3) Individual development plans supporting self-awareness (McCauley et al., 2010; Reilly et al., 2014)
4) Mentor/mentee arrangements allowing daily support for social processes on the job (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
5) Team-work structures to distribute power and increase 'psychological safety' during group meetings (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), using 'turn-taking', small group discussions, and allowing temporary use of one's first language

In general, the Chinese managers appreciated the Western companies' rigorous opportunities for training in areas such as change management, communication, leadership styles, and dealing with stress. In terms of providing such opportunities for female leaders, the Western companies were perceived as better than their Chinese competitors.

7.8.2.1 Learning from unsuccessful practices

Areas where the Western companies were considered unsuccessful are related to pedagogical approaches: 1) aligning with company values, 2) learning from China, and 3) nationality-based. Consequently, this study recommends that Western companies in China avoid the following:

1) A lack of investment (time and money) in developing Chinese managers from current positions into senior roles. In line with Casimir and Waldman (2007), such practices are likely to create a 'glass ceiling'
2) Unclear criteria for selection, leading to a lack of awareness of desired leadership behaviour (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009)
3) Initiatives with a lack of purpose; for instance, courses that do not relate to the participants' current job responsibilities (Wang, 2011)

4) Failing to develop mutual exchange of knowledge between the Chinese and Western organisations. As seen by Aime et al. (2014), failing to understand the culture can be harmful to the collaboration
5) Using ABCs as a quick fix to make Chinese employees listen

Overall, the Chinese managers called for better communication regarding the type of leader sought by the companies, to avoid misconceptions regarding what was expected of them. Wang (2011) and Hempel and Martinsons (2009) propose that such misconceptions can be culturally determined and thus particularly damaging for cross-cultural collaborations. Consequently, this study suggests the need for clear descriptions and responsibilities for expectations of leaders at different levels of the organisation. Moreover, through rotation schemes (Day & Dragoni, 2015) and 'dyadic' leadership development initiatives (Dulebohn et al., 2012), these mappings can become an integrated part of the company culture.

7.8.3 Care and Guanxi

This study found that the Chinese managers had different expectations of leaders than their Western colleagues did. This was particularly true for the concept of care. The Chinese managers conceptualised leadership with reference to Confucianism (Lin, Ho, & Lin, 2013; Romar, 2002), Daoism (Bai & Morris, 2014; Davis, 2004), and legalism (Hwang, 2008; Ma & Tsui, 2015), consequently idealising leaders who are role models and both truly caring and strictly controlling. This study finds that human-heartedness (*rén* 仁), in particular, differs from the way care is conceptualised in a Western context. Consequently, I suggest that Western companies must remain particularly aware of these differences between their own leadership and leadership development practices and those common in China, since care here is reduced to a professional relationship and is thus likely to appear cynical and cold in a Chinese context.

Second, this study supports the existing scholarship on guanxi (Chen & Lee, 2008; Hennig, 2017), suggesting that the existence of a comprehensive interdependent network of mutual benefits has vital consequences for success in China. As guanxi is deeply rooted in the Chinese culture, the engagement in such networks is associated with a high

level of trust in Chinese leaders. The Chinese high-potential employees in this study invited the senior management of the Western companies to reflect on why they needed Chinese top leaders in their companies in the first place and whether they genuinely believed that Chinese leaders are better at taking on top leadership responsibility in China. If so, the companies are advised to allow better opportunities for Chinese leaders to prove their worth, whilst acknowledging that some tasks would be managed differently if tackled by Western leaders. These interviewees suggested a strategy of beginning with less important leadership tasks and subsequently scaling up. It was also suggested that Chinese leaders be provided with global exposure and experience working with senior Western colleagues.

7.8.4 Strengths and Constraints of a Phenomenographic Approach

There are a number of strengths and constraints associated with using a phenomenographic method in a complex and nuanced topic, such as cross-cultural conceptions of leadership and leadership development. In this section, I will outline the issues I encountered during this study and detail how I dealt with them.

7.8.4.1 Comparing companies versus identifying a set of conceptions

Initially, when deciding to explore the research questions of this dissertation, I wanted to investigate and compare approaches to leadership development in a number of global companies of different industries. Ideally, such analysis would help to uncover those companies that turned out to be more successful in their approaches to leadership development in China and, ultimately, suggest ways in which they could learn from one another's practices. However, during the data collection process, it quickly became clear that the reality was too complex to apply a single type of leadership conception to an entire company practice.

On the contrary, different employees reported different views; and in many cases, employees within a company significantly disagree with the perspectives of their colleagues. Some interviewees even reported quotations that directly contradicted their own conceptions expressed earlier in the interview. Thus, to determine which company was more effective in terms of developing leaders in China, I needed to

identify the most popular views and generalise this to a given company practice. Such an approach highlights the view of the majority and ignores the contradictory views that inevitably arise within the organisation.

Alternatively, I considered embracing the complexity of the data and acknowledging all views. By adhering to a phenomenographic approach, I strived to elucidate the patterns within sets of interconnected conceptions of the phenomena in question, as opposed to identifying only the most common views (Åkerlind, 2012; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Thus, I included contradictory perceptions for a more nuanced picture of the leadership development challenges in China. A consequence of this approach, however, is that there was no longer a possibility of directly comparing and evaluating different company practices as one entity. Whilst I urge future researchers to extend the findings of this dissertation and further explore how companies and industries successfully develop leaders in China, the methodological choice chosen for this study constrained me from drawing such conclusions.

7.8.4.2 Leadership paradigms and phenomenography

In Chapter 3, I described how phenomenographic findings are organised analytically in a structural relationship within a set of qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2012). However, when asking interviewees in the pilot study about their leadership conceptions (see section 3.4.7), the responses were largely vague ideas and, in some cases, simple reproductions of company slogans and values. Meanwhile, it quickly became apparent that, when unfolding the term by drawing references to the empirical leadership paradigms, the conversations expanded to include cross-cultural perceptions of leadership and leadership development in China and the West.

Although phenomenography, in its nature, suggests a more explorative and bottom-up approach to data collection and analysis (Bowden, 2005), I challenged the rigor of this methodology by applying a 'forced choice' element (Heineman, 1953) to the interview technique. Specifically, halfway through each of the interview sessions, I introduced the participants to the six leadership paradigms. This choice slightly contradicted the fundamental philosophy of phenomenography which strives, as far as possible, to maintain an open mind and minimise the effect of any predetermined

views about the nature of the categories (Åkerlind, 2012, Åkerlind, 2008). The choice is, however, in line with the Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) pragmatist idea that the nature of the research question – and not the epistemological stance – should decide the method. The authors argue that only in this way can a superior understanding of a social phenomenon be attained. In alignment with this view, I have treated the research methodology of this study as a tool to help me understand a complex phenomenon of the world in which I live, as what Nussbaum (1986) and Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describe as a 'wise perceiving agent'. In other words, I adopted a 'forced choice' methodology (Heineman, 1953) to increase the use-value of the study and thus overcome the constraints linked to utilising a phenomenographic approach on such a complex and nuanced topic (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

7.8.4.3 Outlining positive and negative views in phenomenography

Finally, throughout the interviews, the participants reported positive and negative views on the respective companies' leadership and leadership practices. Amongst phenomenography scholars, such quotations are not thought of as conceptions, but rather as value-based interpretations (Johnson, 2006; Johansson et al., 2006). Thus, scholars adhering to the phenomenographic approach are interested in exploring the structural relationship between ways in which people perceive and conceptualise various aspects of reality and less interested in whether these views are positively or negatively charged in their nature (Marton, 1981; Tight, 2016).

By focussing solely on exploring conceptions, as phenomenographic scholars suggest (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016; Larsson & Holmström, 2007), I am able to identify and discuss matches and mismatches between different interpretations of reality. However, this approach does not illuminate the participants' thoughts on which leadership development initiatives worked better than others. Consequently, in line with Kvale and Brinkman (2009), for pragmatic reasons, I included short sessions outlining positive and negative views on leadership and leadership development. In these either positively or negatively charged sections, the question of reliability was less appropriately determined through interrater-reliability checks, and to a higher degree associated with whether these experiences and considerations could create value for other practitioners in the field.

By utilising a phenomenographic approach in this study, I ensured a systematic and rigorous method for my data analysis. However, as with any methodology, the choice of adhering to a phenomenographic stance led to the emergence of a number of constraining issues. By thinking creatively and adjusting my methodological stance in accordance with the research topic, I was able to mitigate the constraints to some extent, without compromising the principles of phenomenography.

7.8.4.4 Key Messages

Whilst various constraints are embedded in the phenomenographic approach, the method also opened up new perspectives on cross-cultural leadership and leadership development in China. In this section, I will summarise what I believe are the key messages derived from the findings of this study, as identified in conversations I am having with people in the field. These messages are presented in table 7.1 to help scholars and practitioners in the field to avoid the key problems I experienced during this study.

Table 7.1: Overview of key messages and actions for professionals in the field

	Key message	Actions to avoid key problem
About strategy	Cross-cultural leadership development in China has consistently been related to issues far beyond the responsibility of human resources functions alone. On the contrary, situating itself more towards an exploration of strategic and structural accelerators and hindrances for leadership development, rather than a study of the effectiveness of teaching methodologies. In this study, cross-cultural leadership and leadership development in China were closely linked to organisational strategic decisions, as opposed to being reduced to a solely didactical matter.	A key message of this study is that Western companies are encouraged to further reflect on the strategic reasons for their presence in China. In particular, they are asked to clearly articulate whether their Chinese activities are due to access to talent resources, holding off competitors, reaching Chinese consumers, accessing cheap production facilities, gaining innovation capacity, access to data, achieving prestige in the West, and so on. It was a central point that the strategic reason for the presence in China would affect the trust and autonomy given to the Chinese employees; therefore, clearly and honestly informing these individuals about the purpose of the Chinese activities was considered vital.
About ladership conceptions	Conceptions of leadership and leadership development differed significantly across the group of interviewees in China and the West. These multifaceted conceptions caused difficulties in cross-cultural collaborations.	Defining how leadership and leadership development are conceptualised is an important first step for researchers and practitioners in the field of cross-cultural leadership development in China.
	Overall, Chinese leadership is associated with hierarchical practices, and Western leadership with 360-degree practices. The Chinese employees working at Western companies, however, portrayed themselves as situated somewhere in between these leadership models. Whilst appreciating the free knowledge-sharing and friendly working environments in the Western companies, they also valued the effectiveness and work-pace associated with Chinese leadership.	From a self-perspective, Chinese employees working in Western companies constitute a cultural sub-group: considering themselves neither Chinese nor Western, but inspired by both. It is a central message of this study that the self-perception of Chinese employees differs from the Western employees' descriptions of them. In most cases, Western employees did not recognise their Chinese employees as being any different to those working in local Chinese companies. I urge scholars and practitioners in the field to recognise the degree to which the Chinese leaders in question have been – and feel themselves to be – affected by Western culture and norms. This is as opposed to placing them in a category of 'Chinese leaders', indistinct from Chinese employees with limited Western exposure.
	Chinese employees reported a tendency to agree with all leadership paradigms to a higher degree than their Western colleagues did. In this study, I have argued that such a way of conceptualising leadership may be interpreted as a holistic, logical reasoning, linked to a Daoist philosophical perspective.	In this study, Western employees in various cases associated holistic logical reasoning with indecisiveness and a lack of ability to engage in conflict. It is a key action of this study that researchers and other practitioners in the field of cross-cultural leadership should, as far as possible, avoid evaluating other types of leadership using solely their own assumptions. Instead, it is vital to seek to explore the assumptions underpinning other ways of enacting and thinking about leadership.
Leadership & leadership development	Whilst Chinese leadership and leadership development were initially conceptualised as hierarchical and strict, they were later referred to as significantly more 'caring' and 'warm' than Western practices. This complexity was explained by a 'hidden social contract' in which the power granted to the leader came with the responsibility to genuinely care about their subordinates. This was often referred to as a type of paternalism	Whereas freedom and opportunities for professional growth in the Western companies are associated with care, the Chinese employees reported a sense of loneliness and discomfort when working under Western leaders, who they felt did not genuinely care about them. It is a central action derived from this study that Westerners operating in China should not assume that professional growth, giving of responsibility, and asking for advice are perceived by their employees as genuine care. I urge Western scholars and practitioners in the field to further explore the concepts of care and 'guanxi' to establish a consensus on interpersonal relations in work.
Leadership development	The Chinese employees generally appreciated initiatives where the Western companies invested in their professional development. Such initiatives included exposure to senior management or cases where the Western company showed interest in trying to understand Chinese culture and leadership philosophies.	It is a central recommendation of this study that approaches to leadership development in China meet this challenge as a 'two-edged sword', where the practice combines teaching of Western values and an attempt to understand Chinese culture. Any attempts described in this study to develop leaders without an understanding of Chinese culture were reported as inappropriate, ineffective, and potentially harmful to trust and collaboration.

7.9 Limitations

In this section, a number of limitations associated with the conducted study and its research stance are acknowledged. First, limitations regarding generalisability in the utilised qualitative research design should be mentioned. There is an extant debate in the literature as to whether it is possible to generalise qualitative research findings and also whether generalisability is a relevant criterion for evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Sin, 2010). Schwandt (2001), for instance, went as far as to argue that meanings of complex phenomena are context-specific and that there are no context-free meanings. Others, such as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), propose that generalisations can be understood other than from a positivist or operationalist stance. Here, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) propose the concept of 'analytical generalisation', suggesting that researchers can make generalisations based on knowledge of an individual case in the context of the wider field. By specifying the analytical process and supporting evidence for the generalisability of this evidence, the researcher enables the reader to judge the soundness of the claims. Finally, specific to phenomenographic research, Sin (2010) argues that if the transferability of findings is the motivation for the study, it is crucial that the research design considers the possible context and the extent to which the findings can be usefully applied at the outset of the study. In line with Goodall and Roberts (2003), I trust that the descriptions and interview quotes are sufficiently detailed and rich for readers to judge whether the experiences of the five companies in question have relevance to their own organisations.

Second, the analysis of this study is based on a sample of 24 Chinese managers and seven representatives from the Western headquarters, thus demographic variables receive little attention. Whilst aspects such as gender, title, and nationality were briefly considered, this study did not go on to analyse the demographic data on gender, age, and educational level of the participants. Hence, it remains unknown whether these variables have an impact on the perceptions of the participants, and if so, how.

Third, Åkerlind (2012) argues that, in the context of multiple legitimate interpretations of the same data, a strong emphasis should be placed on researchers' ability to argue persuasively for the particular interpretation that they propose. There is thus no longer a search for the 'right' interpretation, but rather for an interpretation that is defensible (Kvale, 1996, p. 199; Marton & Booth, 1997). Ideally, I would have worked in a

research group and, throughout the process, worked to defend and revise my analytical perspectives. However, being a novice in the world of research and required to carry out the dissertation single-handedly, this was not an option. Instead, I attempted to compensate for the absence of a research team by following the Åkerlind (2005) and Guba (1981) recommendations for detailing each interpretative step to readers, with examples that clearly illustrate each step. Moreover, following McHugh (2012) and Tigchelaar, Vermunt, and Brouwer (2014), I conducted inter-rater reliability checks to ensure that my analysis process matched that of another like-minded researcher.

Finally, due to the early scientific stage of the topic and the lack of shared understanding in the field (Barkema et al., 2015; Day & Dragoni, 2015), the research questions were formulated broadly. Whilst this approach is considered suitable for exploring conceptions and laying a cornerstone on which future research can build, it raises a myriad of questions concerning cross-cultural leadership development in China, which require further investigation.

7.10 Further Research

Various new questions and possible paths arose during this research project. In this section, I will outline the crucial recommendations for further research. Barkema et al. (2015) note that the field of management, despite an increase in studies using Chinese data, typically involves applications of existing Western theories, rather than development of new ideas. This study has sought to account for the tendency to exclude Chinese theory by examining leadership and leadership tendencies related to Confucianism, Daoism, and legalism (Chen & Lee, 2008). However, as these philosophies are based on ancient ideas and observations, I encourage further empirical testing to develop a holistic indigenous modern Chinese leadership paradigm. In other words, whereas this study laid a cornerstone for the theory-building of modern Chinese leadership and leadership development – with a framework consisting of traditional Western leadership paradigms and Chinese leadership philosophies – future research should examine this these findings empirically in new contexts to establish a contemporary Chinese leadership paradigm. Such a paradigm could, for instance, be

included in future studies utilising the 'Opinion Sheet' and 'Ranking of Statements' interview tools developed for use in this study (see Chapter 3).

Second, to mitigate the risk of misinterpreting Chinese culture and failing to grasp the complexity of the central differences between East and West, I urge future research teams in the field of cross-cultural leadership development in China to unite across borders and form mixed research terms with balanced representation in terms of gender, age, and nationality. I argue that culturally heterogeneous teams, mixing Chinese and Western researchers, reduces the risk of imposing analytical points based on either Western or Chinese assumptions; and by contrast, it creates the opportunity for nuanced understanding of one another's motivations for conceptualising and enacting leadership and leadership development.

Second, as the views of effective leadership and leadership development are based on a sample of just 24 Chinese managers and seven representatives from the Western headquarters, future research should include larger samples of participants to allow greater generalisation. Moreover, this study does not attempt an analysis of the demographic data of participants' gender, age, or educational level. Hence, it remains unknown whether these variables have an impact on perceptions, and if so, how. The empirical testing of this study's findings could be upscaled by use of surveys (Field, 2013; Gill & Johnson, 2002). Such an approach to further research would allow consideration of the impact of demographic variables on perceived leadership and leadership development effectiveness, which could establish a basis for further qualitative testing. By adopting both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a so-called 'mixed methods approach', the researcher may gain a fuller understanding of the issue at hand (e.g., Dehlholm-Lambertsen & Maunsbach, 1998; Rasmussen et al., 2007).

Third, the sample in this study came from Western multinational companies in China, which are known to be distinct from state-owned enterprises and Chinese-founded multinationals in terms of their organisational culture, structure, and leadership practices (Tan, 2001; Wang, 2011). Whilst the interviewed managers reported their perceptions of leadership in Chinese-based companies, I encourage future researchers to compare the findings of this study with others concerning state-owned enterprises and Chinese home-grown multinationals. Future studies should extend the results to include other 'hybrid' organisational forms, such as private, collectives and townships, as well as joint venture

enterprises, to determine how organisational ownerships influence the behaviour of managers and perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership behaviours. Such a comparison will help to provide a holistic picture of Chinese managers. Similarly, future scholars should focus on the differences between industries. This study has collected data across five different industries to gain a broad explorative overview. It would, however, be relevant to conduct in-depth studies and analyses of the different industries to uncover how perceptions of effective leadership and leadership development differ between these.

Fourth, this study focused solely on managerial personnel. Their perception of leadership effectiveness may differ from that of non-managerial employees (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Further studies should include non-managerial personnel and compare their perceptions with those of managers to cross-validate the findings. Methodologically, this study relies on phenomenographic analysis of interviews as its primary source of data. Researchers are encouraged to adopt different research designs and data collection methods (e.g., mixed-method research) to triangulate data and data interpretation.

Finally, I have outlined above the limitations of generalising from qualitative research. Whilst these are valid concerns, I propose a rewrite of this research as a more action-based journalistic piece aimed at senior managers and CEOs of multinational companies. Such channels for dissemination could be newspapers, television debates, and business reviews, which could stimulate considerable debate and action in the community I am seeking to influence. The research questions of this study are vivid and creating a journalist artefact from this could make my theoretical position(s) and my findings equally vivid and pertinent.

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Appendix A:
Sample Information Sheet, Consent Forms, and De-brief Sheet

A1: INORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: 'Cross-Cultural Leadership Development in China

You are invited to take part in a research project exploring cross-cultural leadership development of multinational companies in China.

This project will analyse the strategies that 5 Fortune 500 companies adopt when training leaders in China. The aim is to contribute to the understanding of 'what works' when training leaders cross-culturally in China and, ultimately, to acquire more local Chinese leaders in the top positions of multinational companies. I will conduct interviews and a survey analysing: 1) How Chinese managers conceptualise good leadership and leadership development; 2) The strategies for leadership development that the companies adopt when training managers in China; and 3) How the Chinese managers perceive utilised strategies for leadership development.

The study is being conducted by **Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen** and it will contribute to his Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge.

In the study, you will engage in an interview with me lasting for approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be based around following themes:

1) Your responsibilities, background, and future ambitions.
2) Your experiences with participating in leadership development initiatives.
3) Your view on what effective leadership is.
4) Your view on what effective leadership development is.

In summary, I am interested in your views of leadership as broad ideals - as well as how it more specifically is being carried out in practice in your company. Where does it work very well, and which challenges do you experience?

I hope this gives an idea of my interests. If you need any further elaboration, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Taking part in this study is **completely voluntary** and **you can stop taking part in the study at any time** without explanation or prejudice. **You may also withdraw** any information that you have provided.

If you feel that, during the study, you don't want to participate and you feel uncomfortable or worried about taking part, you can stop. If after the study you feel worried and or concerned about what you have said, feel free to contact Professor and Supervisor Jan Vermunt, Dr Keith Goodall, or myself.

Your responses and **contact details will be strictly confidential**. The data from the study may be used in research publications. You will <u>not</u> be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact: **Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen / Professor Jan Vermunt, P&E, University of Cambridge.**

Principal Researcher:
Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen
Department of Psychology and Education
University of Cambridge
Mobile: [anonymised]
Email: [anonymised]

Supervisor 1:
Name: Professor Jan Vermunt
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
Phone: [anonymised]
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Supervisor 2:
Name: Keith Goodall
Cambridge Judge Business School
Email: [anonymised]

A2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher: **Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen**
Project Title: **Cross-Cultural Leadership Development in China**
Faculty: **Faculty of Education**

Dear Participant,

My name is Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen and I am a Danish Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Cambridge. Through my studies, I have lived and studied in Hong Kong for half a year, which helped me develop a great interest in the Chinese culture. I have a strong interest towards how global companies manage to establish and improve leadership development between organisations with substantial diversity of culture. In particular, I find it interesting how global enterprises manage to create effective working environments across national borders and unleash the full potential of their workforce in China.

You have been invited to participate in an interview conducted by **Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen** who is studying at the University of Cambridge, UK. The interview contributes to a Ph.D. The study will explore the strategies multinational companies in different industries adopt when designing and implementing leadership development programmes in China.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and it will be carried out at your office or another location at your choice. Your participation in the study will be approximately 45-60 minutes depending on the amount of knowledge you should wish to share.

As a participant you will be asked a number of interview questions through an informal conversation.
For research purposes, your voice will be **audio recorded** to assist in collecting knowledge for the thesis.

Your participation will involve **sharing knowledge through an interview**.
If you consent to participate, you agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

You acknowledge that:

- Any risks and possible effects for **sharing knowledge** have been explained to my satisfaction and that I am fully aware of what this research project is about;
- Taking part in this study is voluntary and you are aware that you can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and have the ***"right to withdraw"*** any knowledge you have provided;
- That any information you give will be kept **strictly confidential** and that no names will be used to identify interviewees in this study without their approval;
- Confidentiality can be assured of **personal interview** information

(Please tick to indicate consent)

I consent to participate in an interview in the study:		**Yes**		**No**
I consent for my voice to be **audio recorded** during **the interview** of the study:		**Yes**		**No**

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	**Date:**

A3: DEBRIEF SHEET

"Cross-cultural leadership development in China"

Dear Participant,

Through my doctoral study, you were asked to participate and contribute with your experiences with leadership development initiatives in China. You completed a one-hour interview exploring: 1) Views of effective leadership, 2) Collaborations between the Western headquarters and the Chinese organisation; 3) Views on effective leadership development initiatives in general; and 4) Personal experiences with leadership development initiatives in your company.

You are reminded that your original consent document included the following information: *"right to withdraw"*. If you have any concerns about your participation or the knowledge you shared, please do not hesitate to discuss this with me. I will be happy to provide any information I can to help answer any questions you might have about this study.

If you feel, after the study, that you want to withdraw any knowledge you have shared, I shall exclude your provided data.

If you have questions about your participation in the study, please contact me at [anonymised], or my faculty supervisor, Professor Jan Vermunt [anonymised]. Alternatively, you can ask the your HR Director to get in touch with me on your behalf, and I can respond to your questions.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Faculty of Education Graduate Office: +44(0) 1223 767 726, Christine [anonymised], e-mail [anonymised].

Please again accept my appreciation for your participation in this study.

Daniel Martin Agerbech Petersen Date:

Appendix B:
Sample Interview Schedules, Opinion Sheet, and Ranking Statements

B1: Interview Schedule for Chinese High-Potential Employees

I. Opening

1. **(Establish Rapport)** [shake hands] My name is Daniel Petersen and as a PhD student researching leadership development in China, [contact name] thought it would be a good idea to interview you, so that I can gain an understanding of how leaders are trained in [company name], China. The person here next to me is X and will translate what I say (in case translator is needed).
2. **(Purpose)** I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your experiences with leadership development in [company name], and your personal understanding of good leadership in order to learn more about you and your companies professional practice in this area. Do you mind if I record the interview? This will enable me to focus on our conversation and no one else but me will listen it back.
3. **(Motivation)** I hope to use this information anonymously in my PhD project in order to help companies in China to acquire more local Chinese leaders in their top positions.
4. **(Time Line)** The interview should take about 60 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

II. Body

A Topic: Current responsibilities, background, and ambitions

1. Can you tell me about your leadership responsibilities and general professional responsibilities in [company name]?

   (Goals: I. which level of leadership is the employee at; II. which type of leadership is the employee practicing; and III. for how many people does the participant practice leadership).

2. Can you tell me about your background and how long you have worked in [company name]?

   (Goals: I. what is the employee's profile; II. how long has the employee been at his/her current leadership level; III. what are the general background characteristics of local employees of the company)

3. What are your personal professional ambitions? Where do you see yourself in 5 years, in 20 years in terms of leadership responsibilities?

   (Goals: I. do LDPs empower the ambition to advance in the company; II. does the company have local leaders on its higher levels; and III. is there a hidden "glass ceiling in the company's pipeline prohibiting the locals for advancing their leadership potential).

B Experiences with leadership development programmes (LDPs)

4. Can you tell me about the LDP that [company name] has utilised in order to develop your leadership skills through your professional career?

   (Goals: I. how often has training and leadership development initiatives been provided and from whom; II. what skills/competencies have been trained/developed on different steps of company pipeline; and III. what are the most essential experiences with the LDPs).

5. What from the LDP have you found most useful for being a leader? Why?

   (Goals: I. which LD initiatives have qualified the employee to become a better leader; II. which training activities were generally a success).

6. Which aspects of the leadership development initiatives and training activities in [company name] have you found less successful? What was the reason for this?

   (Goals: I. Which elements should according to the employee be changed; II. which training activities and initiatives are damaging the company; III. where are potential cultural clashes.).

7. Overall, to what extent do you think the LDP is successful in [company name], China? Why?

   (Goals: I. what works, what should be changed; II. should HQs dictate more or less; III. on which areas are the LDPs working with and against the Chinese culture).

C Topic: Conceptualisation of effective leadership

8. What do you consider ‘effective leadership’? Why?

   (Goals: I. which view on leadership (philosophy) does the employee adopt; II. what are the core leadership values of the employee).

9. What do you think that HQs of [company name] consider ‘good leadership’?

   (Goals: I. Are there any differences between the conceptualisation of good leadership in China and in HQs; II. how do Chinese employees perceive HQs’ conceptualisation of good leadership).

10. In front of you, you have 6 statements describing 6 different ideas of what good leadership is (see p. 6). I would now like us to go through each statement separately, with you telling me whether you tend to agree or disagree with each statement and why.

    (Goals: I. with reference to which streams of research do Chinese employees define good leadership).

11. Now we will go through the statements once again. I would like you to rate the statements again, but this time with regarding what you think the general view of the HQs in your company would be, and why.

    (Goals: I. finding out how the Chinese employees view the general trend in HQs' conceptualisation of good leadership. II. Finding matches and mismatches in conceptualisations of good leadership, viewed from Chinese employees' perspective).

12. Finally, I would like you to firstly list all 6 statements in order to your priority. Secondly, I would like you to rank the statements as you believe the HQs' would prioritise them. While you are doing this, please tell me your thoughts on this.

    (Goals: Same as question 10 and 11. This is done in the unlikely event that participants agree or disagree with all statements).

D Topic: Chinese employees' conceptualisation of good leadership development in China

13. Can you tell me about what good leadership development in a Chinese context is from your point of view?

    (Goals: what activities for leadership development do Chinese employees think are particularly effective in China; II. does this differ in different parts/regions of China. III. are Chinese employees more inclined to favour classroom teaching, group work, cases etc.)

14. Is there a general trend or tendency as to how Chinese employees in [company name] view good leadership development?

    (Goal: I. is there a special trend or view on leadership in this particular company; II. if so, what is done to motivate/create this idea. III. to what extent is the company trying to establish a unique leadership development culture).

15. Is good leadership development in a Chinese context in your view different from good leadership development in a European context? If so, in what ways?

    (Goals: Finding differences in leadership development between China and HQs)

16. What are the three most important things to keep in mind when designing and implementing LDPs in a Chinese context? Why?

    (Goals: I. how do Chinese employees conceptualise good LD in China; II. how LD differ in China.

III. Closing

A. (Additional information) We have now reached the end of this interview, and I have no further questions to ask you. I wonder if you would have anything to add to the things we have discussed, or any points you have made, you would like to elaborate on?

B. (Maintain Rapport) I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know for my project?

C. (Action to be taken) I should have all the information I need. In case you come across any additional information, you are very welcome to contact me over e-mail or phone at any point.

I wonder if it would it be all right for me to get in touch over e-mail if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to using the data in my dissertation.

B2: Interview Schedule for Headquarters

I. Opening

1. **(Establish Rapport)** [shake hands] My name is Daniel Petersen and as a PhD student researching leadership development in China, [contact name] thought it would be a good idea to interview you, so that I can gain an understanding of how leaders are trained in [company name], China.
2. **(Purpose)** I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your experiences with leadership development in [company name], and your personal understanding of good leadership in order to learn more about you and your companies professional practice in this area. Do you mind if I record the interview? This will enable me to focus on our conversation and no one else but me will listen it back.
3. **(Motivation)** I hope to use this information anonymously in my PhD project in order to help companies in China to acquire more local Chinese leaders in their top positions.
4. **(Time Line)** The interview should take about 60 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

II. Body

A Topic: General approach to leadership development programmes (LDPs)

1. Can you tell me about the programmes you use for leadership development (LD) in broad outlines?

   (Goals: I. what skills/competencies are required on different steps of company pipeline; II. who design which parts of the programmes and with which people).

2. Can you tell me about which general training activities for LD do you utilise in [company name] and why did you choose these in particular?

   (Goals: I. which activities/components are utilised; II. what are the main purposes of different LDP activities - to gain profit, accelerate career paths, and/or stimulate company values etc.)

3. What are the underlying views and thoughts behind your LDPs?

   (Goals: I. which leadership development philosophy does the company adopt; II. why is leadership taught; III. general view on teaching/training)

B Topic: Experiences with applying LDPs in China. Which view on their Chinese organisation/employee do they adopt?

4. Can you tell me about your LDPs in China? In which ways are these differently designed than [company name]'s organisations in the rest of the world?

   (Goals: I. what specific activities in the programmes are particularly successful/unsuccessful in China; II. does culture play role when designing LDPs in China. III. what is the major focus and challenges when training leaders in China.

5. China is a big country with a large population. Can you tell me about the considerations you have about applying LDPs in different regions/cities of China?

   (Goals: I. what are the views on differences in corporate culture nationally; II. are there LD initiatives which are more successful in some parts of China than in others).

6. What degree of freedom do the Chinese organisations/departments get in order to tailor the LDPs to their own organisation?

   (Goals: I. Why is a high/low degree of autonomy chosen; II. would the company wish a higher/lower degree of local autonomy in the tailoring of LDPs and why; III. If so, what would it take to achieve a higher/lower degree of autonomy in design of LDPs).

7. To what extent would you say your LDPs in China are working? Which targets do you have for leadership development in China?

   (Goals: I. are there numerical targets; II. how many Chinese leaders do they want in place and at what leve; III. are Chinese leaders behaving the way they want after the prorammes).

8. Can you tell me about what you think needs to change to improve the situation from the Chinese side (different attitudes, willingness to learn, and apply different skills) or perhaps even from the company side?

   (Goals: I. is there a lack of willingness to learn; II. are there differences in attitudes and/or skills; III. is the company aware of where it wants to change).

C Topic: Conceptualisation of good leadership

9. Can you tell me about your personal professional view on good leadership and your perception of [company name]'s view.

   (Goals: I. which view on leadership (philosophy) does the company adopt; II. what are the core leadership values of the company).

10. If you had to guess, how do you think a typical Chinese employee in [company name] would define good leadership?

(Goals: I. Are there any differences between the conceptualisation of good leadership in China and in HQs; II. how do HQs conceptualise good leadership in a Chinese context).

11. In front of you, you have 6 statements describing 6 different ideas of what good leadership is (see p. 6). I would now like us to go through each statement separately, with you telling me whether you tend to agree or disagree with each statement and why.

    (Goals: I. with reference to which streams of research do HQs define good leadership).

12. Now we will go through the statements once again. I would like you to rate the statements again, but this time with regarding what you think the majority of Chinese employees in your company would answer, and why.

    (Goals: I. finding out how HQs view the general trend in Chinese employees' conceptualisation of good leadership. II. Finding matches and mismatches in conceptualisations of good leadership, viewed from HQs perspective).

13. Finally, I would like you firstly to list all 6 quotations in order to what you believe is the HQs' priority. Secondly, I would like you to rank the statements as you believe the Chinese employees' would prioritise them. While you are doing this, please tell me your thoughts on this.

    (Goals: Same as question 8 and 9. This is done in the unlikely event that participants agree or disagree with all statements).

D Topic: HQs conceptualisation of effective leadership development in China

14. Can you tell me about what good leadership development is in a Chinese context? Which types of activities do they prefer, and which do they need, from your point of view?

    (Goals: what does HQs think is particularly effective in China; II. where do they want to improve. III. are Chinese employees more inclined to favour classroom teaching, group work, cases etc.)

15. Is good leadership development in a Chinese context in your view different from good leadership development in a European context? If so, in what ways?

    (Goals: Finding differences in leadership development between China and HQs)

16. What are the three most important things to keep in mind when designing and implementing LDPs in a Chinese context? Why?

    (Goals: I. how do HQs conceptualise good LD in China; II. how LD differ in China.)

III. Closing

A. (Additional information) We have now reached the end of this interview, and I have no further questions to ask you. I wonder if you would have anything to add to the things we have discussed, or any points you have made, you would like to elaborate on?

B. (Maintain Rapport) I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know for my project?

C. (Action to be taken) I should have all the information I need. In case you come across any additional information, you are very welcome to contact me over e-mail or phone at any point.
I wonder if it would it be all right for me to get in touch over e-mail if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to using the data in my dissertation.

B3: 6 STATEMENTS

(Used for 'Opinion Sheet' and 'Ranking Statements')

1) Successful leadership mostly depends on the personality of the leader. A successful leader must be conscientious, extrovert, dominant, self-confident, energetic and intelligent, open to experience, and emotionally stable.

1）成功的领导主要取决于领导者的个性。一个成功的领导者必须尽职尽 责，外向，主导，自信，充满活力和智慧，开明，而且情绪稳定。

2) Successful leadership is mostly determined by how well the leader adapts to different situations and contexts. A good leader is a good 'diagnostician' who knows when to tell, sell, participate, and delegate in particular contexts. Generally, a great leader is predominantly participative and democratic, rather than directive and autocratic.

2）成功的领导主要取决于领导者如何适应不同的情况和环境。一个好的领导者是一个很好的"诊断医生"， 知道应该在什么情况下训示，鼓励，参与以及授权。一般情况下，一个伟大的领导者主要具备参与性和民主性，而不是指令性和专制性。

3) A successful leader is a heroic, powerful, visionary, and charismatic person who inspires and motivates followers to perform 'beyond contract'.

3）一个成功的领导者是英雄的，强大的，有远见的，有魅力的人，能启发和激励追随者执行"超越合同"的行为。

4) Leadership is a collective process. Consequently, a good leader is a person who provides balance and optimisation of diverse capabilities of the group. This includes distributing the leadership and responsibility so that all employees in one way or another gets to act as a leader.

4）领导力是一个集体的过程。因此，一个好的领导者是那位能提供平衡和集团多元化的功能优化的人。这包括分散领导权，落实责任，使得所有员工都能得到作为一个领导者的机会。

5) Good leadership has more to do with the followers than with the leader. Through more autonomous teams, the agency of the leader is diminished and the agency of the follower asserted. The power of a given leader is more a consequence of the actions of the followers than the cause of it.

5） 良好的领导更多取决于追随者而不是领导者。通过更多的自主团队，领导者的能动性逐渐减少，而跟随者的能动性更加得以彰显。一个既定领导者的力量更多的是追随者行动的结果，而非它的导因。

6) Heroic leaders acting like ‘celebrity bosses’, imposing change from the top, often cause organisational destabilisation. Instead, it is middle managers that achieve the balance between change and continuity. Consequently, successful leadership must always be negotiated, is always partial, and is socially constructed through language.

6） 英雄类的领导者像个“明星老板”一样地由上而下地推行改革，往往造成组织不稳定。相反，中层管理人员更能实现变革和延续之间的平衡。因此，成功的领导必须经常进行协商，始终是片面的，而且是通过社会性的语言构建的。